Library of

Wellesley College.

Purchased from

No

BOOKS FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

THE WISDOM-LITERATURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

BY

W. T. DAVISON, M.A., D.D.

London

CHARLES H. KELLY

25-35 CITY ROAD, AND 26 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

WORKS BY
W. T. DAVISON, M.A., D.D.

The Christian Interpretation of Life, and other Essays. Gilt top, post 8vo, 4s. 6d.

Strength for the Way, and other Sermons. Post 8vo, 3s. 6d.

The Praises of Israel: An Introduction to the Study of the Psalms. With an Appendix treating briefly of the Age, Authorship, and Contents of each Psalm. Sixth Thousand. Small Crown 8vo, 2s. 6d.

The Lord's Supper: Aids to its Intelligent and Devout Observance. Second Thousand. Red lines round page, red edges, crown 8vo, 2s.

The Christian Conscience: A Contribution to Christian Ethics. Sixth Thousand. Crown 8vo, paper cover, net, 1s.; Cloth, net, 2s.

The Word in the Heart. Notes on the Devotional Study of Holy Scripture. Seventh Thousand. Demy 16mo, 1s.

In Remembrance of Me. Helps to the Due Observance of the Lord's Supper. Crown 12mo, paper, 2d.

LONDON: CHARLES H. KELLY, 25-35 CITY ROAD, AND 26 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

THE WISDOM-LITERATURE

OF

THE OLD TESTAMENT.

BY

W. T. DAVISON, M.A., D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "THE PRAISES OF ISRAEL," ETC. ETC.

London

CHARLES H. KELLY

25-35 CITY ROAD, AND 26 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

18

First Edition	. . . .	*November* 1894
Second Edition	. . . .	*September* 1900
Third Edition	. . . .	*October* 1904
Fourth Edition	. . . .	*August* 1912

Sw
74270

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

THE present volume forms a companion to the Author's *Praises of Israel*, and the two books together provide a short introduction to the Poetical Books of the Bible. The phraseology of the title is not strictly accurate, for the Song of Songs does not properly belong to Wisdom-Literature, and Ecclesiastes is not poetical. Further, a complete study of Wisdom-Literature ought to include the two extra-canonical books, Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon. But the canonical books of the Old Testament treated of in these two small volumes belong to the same group of Scriptures and may be conveniently studied together.

It is not proposed to furnish a bibliography to accompany this volume, but since it was first published the literature of the subject has considerably increased. Among the cheaper

and more popular books a few may here be mentioned:—The Commentary on Job, by Dr. A. S. Peake, and that on Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Canticles, by Prof. Currie Martin, in the Century Bible; two volumes in the Cambridge Bible for Schools—Canticles, edited by Dr. Andrew Harper, and The Wisdom of Solomon, by Rev. J. A. F. Gregg; also *The Hebrew Literature of Wisdom*, by J. F. Genung, and *The Wisdom of God and the Word of God*, by Rev. W. R. Harvey-Jellie. If the present volume should induce readers to study the books of the Bible described in it with ampler and more satisfactory aids, the object of the writer will be largely secured.

W. T. D.

RICHMOND, *August* 1912.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE LITERATURE OF WISDOM	1
II.	THE BOOK OF JOB: ITS CONTENTS	20
III.	THE BOOK OF JOB: ITS AGE AND AUTHORSHIP	34
IV.	THE BOOK OF JOB: ITS POETRY	55
V.	THE BOOK OF JOB: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION	75
VI.	THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: ITS STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS	106
VII.	THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: ITS RELIGIOUS TEACHING	130
VIII.	THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: ITS ETHICAL TEACHING	157
IX.	THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: ITS ETHICAL TEACHING (*continued*)	184
X.	ECCLESIASTES: ITS AUTHORSHIP AND DESIGN	211
XI.	ECCLESIASTES: ITS CONTENTS AND SCOPE	234
XII.	THE SONG OF SONGS	272
	INDEX	313

THE WISDOM-LITERATURE

OF THE

OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER I.

THE LITERATURE OF WISDOM.

THE question has from time to time been raised whether it is correct to speak of the philosophical books of the Old Testament. The Bible includes within its rich domains law, history, poetry, prophecy, familiar letters, and sublime apocalytic visions. Does it also contain a Divine philosophy? In the narrower sense of the word, which confines it to human speculations in pursuit of abstract truth, to systematised thoughts, constructed on a basis of metaphysics and ruled by strict laws of reasoning, philosophy is foreign to the Jewish habit of mind, and finds no place in

the sacred Scriptures. The word occurs but once in the Bible (Col. ii. 8), where St. Paul connects it with hollow and disappointing human teaching, worldly in its character and likely to make a prey of the Colossian Christians, who were but newly enfranchised by the world's Redeemer, bringing them into a bondage worse than that from which they had just escaped. But the high-minded and large-hearted apostle did not intend thereby to brand true "philosophy" as vain and misleading because some were found abusing its lofty name. He condemns elsewhere (1 Tim. vi. 20) the "profane babblings and oppositions of the knowledge which is falsely so called," only in order that true Knowledge might maintain her just prerogatives and jurisdiction. In the larger and higher sense of philosophy—the ceaseless search after truth whether for the shaping of thought or the conduct of life—the pondering over all the problems which the human mind can raise concerning things on earth or things in heaven, till they are known as far as may be in their ultimate essence and most complete explanation—the tireless aim to express the truths thus discerned in terms of human reason, and by means of them to formulate principles of life and rules for practice, securing the highest ends possible to man by the best available means—"love of wisdom" thus defined is insepar-

able from the mind of man. In this sense the Greeks are not the only people given to "seek after wisdom." The travelled Ulysses is not the only representative of the

> spirit yearning in desire
> To follow knowledge like a sinking star
> Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This restless, insatiable longing of the human spirit finds its highest illustration in the sacred volume, which alone can truly satisfy it. The Bible reflects all forms of human desire, and it would be strange if an exception were found in the case of the noblest of all. The forms which this quest of the highest truth takes in the Old Testament, and the success which, under the guidance of the Divine Spirit, was attained in it, will form the subject of the following chapters.

A study of the uses of the word "wisdom" (Heb. *Chokmah*) in Scripture reveals much which escapes the notice of the casual reader, who is apt to take the word in its modern sense. Special mention is made, as every child knows, of the wisdom of Solomon, but the passage which describes its nature (1 Kings iv. 29–34) should be carefully studied. The points of difference between the Eastern notion of wisdom a thousand years before Christ and our own three thousand years later, should be clearly understood,

as well as the points of similarity between the two. Considerably before the Exile it becomes tolerably clear that a class of persons existed in Israel named "the Wise," who took their own part in the spiritual education of the chosen race—a part of great significance and value, though it has been thrown into the shade by the superior brilliance and importance of prophets, priests, and psalmists. In Isa. xxix. 14 the mention of "the wisdom of their wise men and the understanding of their prudent men" can perhaps hardly be considered conclusive as to the distinct recognition of a class of "sages," since the reference might be only to sagacious politicians of high repute. But Jeremiah is more definite. The people who distrusted him for his apparent want of patriotism, and who are prepared to "devise devices against him" and "smite him with the tongue," are confident that "the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet." If *Torah*, in the sense of the exposition of the positive precepts of the Old Covenant, belonged to the priest, and the *word of Jehovah*, which was directly given to a chosen messenger,—a word which burned like a fire and smote like a hammer,—belonged to the prophet, there remained still a field of "counsel," the sage and profitable

application of Divine teaching to the actual conduct of life, which belonged essentially to the *Chakamim*, the wise men. It is of these that the precept is given, to "hear the words of the wise" (Prov. xxii. 17); it is their words that are "as goads and as nails well fastened" (Eccles. xii. 11). Youths trained in such a school are described in later days as coming to excel even the Chaldeans of the royal court—men "skilful in all wisdom and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability to stand in the king's palace" (Dan. i. 4). These, with many similar passages, are enough to establish the existence among the Jews of a class of sages, who stood in somewhat the same relation to the prophets of the Old Covenant which was occupied in relation to the prophets of the New, by the Christian instructors and guides known as "pastors and teachers."[1]

That this element in the history of Jewish religion was an important one becomes clear from the remarkable way in which Wisdom is personified in Prov. ix. and elsewhere. The language of Prov. viii. especially has been of signal importance in the history of thought, helping as it does to make a bridge between Eastern and Greek ideas, and to prepare the way for the doctrine of the

[1] Eph. iv. 11; comp. 1 Cor. xii. 28.

Incarnation. The eternal Word is the expression of the eternal Wisdom. A voice from beyond the worlds and the ages says—

> When He prepared the heavens, I was there:
> When He measured out a circle upon the face of the abyss:
> When He made firm the skies above:
> When the fountains of the deep became strong:
> When He gave to the sea His decree,
> That the waters should not pass His commandment:
> When He appointed the foundations of the earth:
> Then I was with Him, as a master-workman:
> And day by day I had delight,
> Rejoicing continually before Him;
> Rejoicing in His habitable earth;
> And having My delight in the children of men.
>
> —(Prov. viii. 27–31.)

The delight of God in His own creation is a fundamental thought in the Jewish Scriptures, and in this passage it is represented as the calm joy of eternal Wisdom working out its own high thoughts in a world of beauty, order, and harmoniously active life and energy. In subsequent ages God "renews His ancient rapture." The wisdom which found delight in the origin of human life, fashioned in the very image of God and reflecting the likeness of the eternal Spirit, still remains man's guide and counsellor. Its high praises are sung again and yet again. Milton

strikes a Greek note when he celebrates the charms of Divine philosophy—

> Not harsh and crabbèd, as dull fools suppose,
> But musical as is Apollo's lute,
> And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,
> Where no crude surfeit reigns.

But Hebraism can triumph over Hellenism on its own chosen ground, and there is nothing in Plato to surpass the conception of celestial Wisdom which dawns upon some of the writers of the Old Testament. Even the strains with which the son of Sirach opens his prosaic musings have a sublimity of their own: "All wisdom cometh from Jehovah, and is with Him for ever." And the book which is known by the name of Wisdom utters its praise in Hebrew music nobly wedded to Greek words: "For she is the effulgence of the everlasting light, and the unspotted mirror of the energy of God, and the image of His goodness. And being but one, she can do all things; and abiding in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all generations entering into holy souls she maketh them friends of God and prophets. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with Wisdom."[1] Traces of the influence both of canon-

[1] Wisd. vii. 26–28. The whole chapter, and indeed the whole book, should be studied, and the development of the Old Testament ideas marked.

ical and uncanonical Scriptures are to be found in the treatment of this subject in the New Testament. Our Lord personifies the Divine Wisdom when He represents it as vindicated, in spite of the cavils of men, by its acts of righteousness and mercy, on the part of all who have learned its worth and earned a right to be styled its children.[1] St. Paul, in two of his most instructive chapters, distinguishes between true and false wisdom, and proclaims for all the ages the message of eternal wisdom as it is recognised among "full-grown and fully-instructed men."[2] And St. James is partly quoting, partly adapting an earlier description of this celestial Guide and Friend, in his lovely picture—a companion to St. Paul's Charity—of the "Wisdom that is from above, first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy." Lofty is the flight of the Greek *Sophia*, but the Hebrew *Chokmah* soars higher still. Both are united in Him who is "unto them that are called the power of God and the wisdom of God."

What shape, then, did the pursuit of wisdom take among the Hebrews, and what special lessons of Divine revelation are taught by means of those

[1] See Matt. xi. 19, with its various readings, and Luke vii. 35.
[2] 1 Cor. ii. 6.

who contributed to the Wisdom-Literature of the Old Testament? The absence of systematic thought, which is one of its characteristics, is, on the whole, neither a disadvantage nor a drawback. The pride of system-making has been the ruin of many theologies. The desire to be complete is the besetting sin of philosophers and dogmatists, and explains the transient character of many of their elaborate constructions. The predominantly practical character of the Hebrew definition of wisdom is again a mark, not of inferiority, but of its superior origin. The main characteristic, however, which explains the rest, lies in the essentially *Divine* qualities which animate and distinguish it. "The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that keep His commandments." The wisdom of the Old Testament is not that of the pure intellect, though intellectual elements are by no means excluded. It belongs to the whole man, and is essentially religious in character. For true religion claims nothing less than the whole man — mind, heart, soul, and strength. Yet if one part of the man is to be specially considered, it is characteristic of the Old Testament to consider his actions. There is true philosophy in this, for the man himself is more truly expressed in the actions which embody

his will than in the ideas and speculations which are the product of his intellect. The depreciation of "Hebraism," as it has been called, in comparison with Hellenism, is unjust. Israel had "received through its higher religion a special summons to ponder on the relations of all things,"[1] and the light which Old Testament teaching sheds upon the problems of man's complex life not only exceeds that of all Greek philosophers and Oriental sages, but belongs to a distinctly higher sphere, and illumines a higher plane of human life.

It is true that the area covered by the word "wisdom" in the Old Testament is tolerably wide, but while the subjects to which it is applied vary considerably, its characteristics remain the same. The language of Ex. xxxi. 3, concerning Bezaleel and Aholiab, the craftsmen of the Tabernacle, show that sometimes wisdom may be applied to what we call art. The description of Solomon's wisdom in 1 Kings iv. 33 shows that it may include what we call physical science. The sphere of law and civil government is expressly included within its range by the narrative of 1 Kings iii., and the definite statement of Prov. viii. 15, "By Me kings reign, and princes decree justice." Even the arts of husbandry are

[1] Ewald, *Hist. of Israel*, iii. 277.

said, in Isa. xxviii. 29, to "come forth from Jehovah, Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom," though the word used for wisdom in this last case is not the prevailing one.

The chief domain, however, of wisdom is that of practical ethics. This is the region to which the aphorisms of Proverbs chiefly apply. It is here that those problems of life arise which perplex Job and some of the psalmists. It was in this field also that the Preacher whom we call Ecclesiastes set himself to discover truth, when he applied his heart "to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven," when he "turned about," and his heart was "set to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the reason of things, and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness."[1] The fullest description of all is found in the first chapter of Proverbs, but it is unnecessary to give a long quotation to prove that for the Jews wisdom and practical religion were substantially one. The worlds of nature and of art were not forgotten; glimpses into deepest spiritual truth show us that these divinely taught Hebrews possessed a rare insight

[1] Eccles. i. 13, vii. 25; and compare i. 16 and ch. ii. throughout.

into the recesses of the human heart and the ultimate problems of human life, but the main field of their judgments is ethical, the main stress of their counsel is practical. "Perhaps the most obvious lesson of the Old Testament," says Bishop Westcott, "lies in the gradual construction of a Divine philosophy by fact, and not by speculation. The method of Greece was to proceed from life to God; the method of Israel (so to speak) was to proceed from God to life. The axioms of the one are the conclusions of the other." [1] Socrates says that knowledge is virtue, Solomon that virtue is knowledge. The Greek philosopher laid it down that no one can knowingly be evil, the Jewish teacher that no evil man can attain true wisdom. Both statements, rightly understood, are true, but the former is a paradox, the latter a practical principle of highest importance.

It is beyond the scope of this brief survey to trace out the history of Wisdom-Literature. Virtually it began with Solomon. This may be established without contending for the Solomonic authorship of all the writings now extant that are ascribed to him. In what sense the name of King Solomon was used in some of these books we shall see shortly. But historic probability combines with trustworthy tradition in ascribing

[1] *Dict. of Bible*, vol. ii. p. 850 (new edition).

to the period of Solomon's reign a remarkable development of the national character. This was manifested in the various departments of commerce, art, and literature, in all that we call civilisation; and whatever the extent of Solomon's extant writings, over and above those Proverbs which "the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah," copied out, it is clear that it is from his time that the strain of teaching known by the specific name of "Wisdom" takes its rise and derives much of its character. Many of the Proverbs doubtless circulated orally long before they were committed to writing. The *Chokmah* strain appears also in several Psalms, amongst them the 1st, the 50th, the 73rd, and the 112th. In the Book of Job, the problem which so greatly exercised the writers of the 37th and 73rd Psalms is treated with great fulness and power. Writers differ as to the propriety of including the Song of Songs in the Literature of Wisdom. The decision obviously depends upon the view taken of the object of that remarkable poem. Zöckler says: "The Song of Solomon must undoubtedly be classed with the Chokmah poetry in its wider sense, because its fundamental idea when rightly viewed must be admitted to belong to the circle of those ethical ideas which form the chief and the favourite subjects of Solomon's doctrine of

wisdom."[1] This question, however, must be postponed till we examine the book itself. In later times, the book called Ecclesiastes (Heb. *Koheleth*) forms a characteristic development of Wisdom-Literature, the nature of which will be duly described in the chapters devoted to the subject. Later developments still do not come within our scope. It may be said, however, in a word or two, that the contact of the Jews with Persia on the one hand, and with Greece on the other, produced a twofold influence, the one modifying Jewish thought in the direction of mysticism, the other in the direction of philosophical speculation. The sapiential literature of the canonical books appears accordingly to have changed its character and to have flowed in two separate streams, one being that which afterwards widened into the turbid current of the Kabbalah, the other being represented by the writings of Philo of Alexandria. The only two non-canonical books which claim mention here are *Ecclesiasticus*, written in Aramaic by Jesus, son of Sirach, in the second century before Christ, the other the *Wisdom of Solomon*, written in Greek by an unknown author perhaps as late as the beginning of the Christian era.

The primitive form of poetry employed by the

[1] Lange's *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Introd. p. 13.

writers of these books has been called *gnomic*. This, however, is simply a name derived from the Book of Proverbs, and explains nothing. It is better to say that the simplest form of the *Mashal* (usually translated "proverb" or "parable") amongst the Hebrews is a short saying, such as we call proverbial, often containing a comparison, or parable in little, and consisting of two brief parallel clauses, constituting what is now called a distich. The form is familiar—

> As cold waters to a thirsty soul,
> So is good news from a far country.
> —(Prov. xxv. 25.)

> A friend loveth at all times,
> And a brother is born for adversity.
> —(Prov. xvii. 17.)

The name *Mashal* is, however, applied to more elaborate utterances, like Balaam's prophecies and the taunting song of Isa. xiv. 4. The Book of Job exhibits a remarkable development of the original "proverbial" structure, since it includes not only a strong dramatic element, but displays remarkable power in utilising the apparently intractable short distich for the building up of lofty and long-sustained argument. The Song of Songs exhibits lyrical and idyllic developments of the original simple form, while in Ecclesiastes

such poetry as was originally present in the "Proverb" has become entirely reflective, and for the most part does not rise above the level of prose.

The four books which will be examined, so far as space will allow, in the following chapters are Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. The uses of such an introductory study as is here proposed are obvious. In the first place, hardly one of the four books, unless it be the second, can be rightly understood without such a preliminary survey of its character and contents. These books form for the Christian as well as the Jew a part of the word of God. But without an intelligent comprehension of the meaning of such a statement, every one of them may be misused—as every one has actually been in the history of the Church—and their language and teaching misapplied. To take the words of Zophar the Naamathite, or the current sayings of worldly prudence incorporated among the Proverbs, or the gloomy musings of Koheleth, or the highly-wrought language of affection in the Canticles, as part of the "word of God," can only be legitimate when the position of each book in the sacred Canon and the scope and true interpretation of each have been made plain. Texts taken from these books have been more frequently ill-used than those drawn from any other part of

the Bible. Obscurities in particular passages may indeed remain here and there after the closest study, but flagrant violation of the general meaning may be prevented by a survey of each book as a whole, and this may prompt the reader to a closer examination of details.

Further, the interest attaching to these books is perennial in character and most practical in its bearings. The problems of life press severely on us still. Light has dawned in these later days to which the author of Job was a stranger, but we have to fight the same battle as that which wrung his soul with anguish, and must make our way to victory by substantially the same path. If some parts of Ecclesiastes appear pessimistic in strain, perhaps there never was an age in which pessimism has ventured more boldly to announce itself as a working creed than that which has produced Schopenhauer and Hartmann, Leopardi and the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*. But the lessons to be drawn from the Wisdom-Literature of the Old Testament are not confined to those who have been compelled to feel keenly the perplexities and sufferings of man's difficult and complex life. The directness of practical exhortation found in some parts of these books makes them suitable for children and for men and women with least time to think

and least capacity for study. The perpetually recurring contrast between wisdom and folly in their practical consequences is familiar to all. But the point of this is sometimes lost for want of an accurate comprehension of the meaning of familiar words. The "fool" described by Solomon does not recognise himself, though he still exists and flourishes after his fashion, in the lounger and the cynic, the voluptuary and the spendthrift, the sceptic and the freethinker, the dilettante and the man of the world, of to-day. A mere study of the eight or nine words used in these books for "fool" contains in itself a series of moral lessons of no slight value. The portraits of the "simple," the man easily persuaded and easily misled,—the "brutish," coarse in grain and dense in his stolid opposition to the loftier truths of life,—the "empty-headed" man, whose apparently incurable levity of character arises from a lack of mental furnishing which is closely connected with perversity of will,—are all drawn with a skill which can only be appreciated by the close observer. Distinct from all these is the "scorner" (Heb. *lētz*), whose complacent self-sufficiency causes him to look down with an arrogance which is its own condemnation upon the simple, straightforward obedience of the man who takes the law of God for his guide, and finds

the doing of the will of God its own sufficient reward. Such a portrait unfortunately never grows old-fashioned, and least of all is it obsolete in the closing years of the nineteenth century. But we must not anticipate the subject-matter of the books themselves. It remains only that the study of this portion of Holy Writ be entered upon in the devout and teachable spirit which "the wise" everywhere inculcate, and with the winning words of Wisdom, one of the choice beatitudes of the Old Testament, sounding in our ears—

> Blessed is the man who listeneth to me,
> Watching daily at my gates,
> Waiting at the posts of my doors!
> For whoso findeth me hath found life,
> And hath obtained favour from Jehovah.
> But he that misseth me wrongeth his own soul:
> All they that hate me love death.
>
> —(Prov. viii. 34–36.)

CHAPTER II.

THE BOOK OF JOB: ITS CONTENTS.

LIKE a lonely pillar amidst the buildings of the Syrian city of Baal-bek, or like one of the massive monoliths standing apart amidst the magnificent ruins of Luxor, is the Book of Job in relation to the other books of the Old Testament. It is with them, but at first sight it seems not to be of them. Its form is unlike that of the rest. It contains little or no reference to Israelitish history or Israelitish law or usages. There is a boldness about its conceptions, an independence in its utterances, which we should hardly expect in a representative of a nation which was distinguished from others by the somewhat severe schooling which Israel needed and received at the hands of its Divine Lord. The people were well drilled—if the phrase may be permitted—by the institutions of the Mosaic Law, by the vicissitudes of a chequered history, by the fearless teaching of faithful prophets, and in other ways, in order that

the Divine purpose for which Israel was chosen might be in due time accomplished. The marks of that thorough discipline appear throughout the Old Testament. The Book of Job at first sight appears to present an exception to the rule. The writer seems to be striking out a path for himself. He is not walking in rank along a well-trodden road, but, like a pioneer, is hewing out his own way through a tangled forest. He strikes vigorously and boldly, sometimes with a sublime audacity which makes the reader start and wonder. The language is as full of fire and vivacity as the thoughts are lofty and inspiring. Finally, while so many of the marks of human genius are present in this noble poem, all the gifts of the writer are touched and consecrated as with the live coal from the altar which stands in the presence of God. The Divine Spirit has quickened with celestial fire and informed with the glow of Divine revelation words which would otherwise have remained so much dead fuel. The Book of Job fitly takes its place in the sacred literature of the Old Covenant, in that volume which is marked out from all others by the seal of Divine inspiration.

But the exact place which the book occupies is not at once discerned, and the student must be content to ascertain it by patient examination. It

will be well first to survey the contents of the book as a whole, then to ask what may be known concerning its composition—its age, its author, its integrity if it be one whole, its construction, if more than one hand be visible in the work. Then we shall be prepared to examine somewhat more in detail the beauty and significance of some of its parts, and lastly, to gather up the scope and teaching of the whole book, and understand its place in the sacred Canon.

The book opens with an introduction, written in prose, which prepares the way for the body of the poem. The scene is laid partly in earth, partly in heaven. Job is pictured in his prosperity, an Oriental prince dwelling in the fertile and picturesque country on the east of the Jordan known as the Hauran. There, in a land lying on the borders of the desert, but itself rich and fruitful, as volcanic districts usually are, intersected by deep gorges filled in winter by rapid streams, Job—pure and upright and godly, a true servant of God—had his dwelling. He was rich in flocks and herds, in sons and daughters, and enjoyed all the prosperity which the "sons of the East" desire and regard as a mark of the favour of Heaven. But even while the picture, drawn by a few graphic strokes, is before us, a curtain is lifted, and a celestial background to

these earthly scenes is exhibited, which prepares the way for sudden and startling changes. The overthrow of Job's solid structure of prosperity is complete and overwhelming. His mountain stands strong—and in a moment it is not. Oxen, asses, sheep and camels; house, with happy sons and daughters gathered in family festival,—all are swept away as with a succession of hurricane blasts, and then Job, "naked" to every wind of adversity, is smitten with the most cruel, loathsome, and incurable of diseases, and, gnawed by pain, his body becoming corrupt before his eyes, he lies, "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted," a burden to his friends, a misery to himself, and a problem to the world. From this situation rises the poem which, like the theme of which it treats, is as full of beauty as it is of obscurities and difficulties. Job's own utterances, the attitude of his friends, the appearance of a stranger, the intervention of the Almighty, Job's confession and subsequent restoration to prosperity, present severally and unitedly a complex problem which precisely corresponds to the complexities of man's tangled, sinful, and suffering life.

For convenience, we present the following tabular analysis of contents:—

PROLOGUE, ch. i., ii. (*prose*). Job's Prosperity.

His calamities permitted by God on the challenge of the Adversary.

THE POEM. *Job's bitter cry* (ch. iii.).

Dialogue with Friends (ch. iv.–xxvi.).

FIRST STAGE.

1. Eliphaz to Job: his remonstrance against Job's complaints; he gently but firmly asserts Divine justice, and bids Job accept chastening (ch. iv., v.). Job to Eliphaz: protests his innocence; complains of abandonment, even God has deserted him (ch. vi., vii.).
2. Bildad to Job: a sharper rebuke, and assertion of the law that the good prosper and the wicked suffer (ch. viii.). Job to Bildad: a bolder arraignment of the justice of God, and a wailing cry that he is weary of life and longing for death (ch. ix., x.).
3. Zophar to Job: still harsher statement of the view that Job is but suffering his deserts, and exhortation to him to turn to God (ch. xi.). Job to Zophar: he taunts his friends with their hardness to the suffering and their unrighteous pleading for God; bewails his unintelligible misery (ch. xii.–xiv.).

SECOND STAGE.

1. Eliphaz to Job: in a changed tone he rebukes Job for presumption (ch. xv.). Job to Eliphaz: he retorts upon the friends, and pathetically appeals to God (ch. xvi., xvii.).
2. Bildad to Job: strongly insists on the doom of the wicked (ch. xviii.). Job to Bildad: indignantly protests and boldly appeals to the arbitrament of a righteous God in the future (ch. xix.).
3. Zophar to Job: a more violent insistence upon the fearful fate of the evil-doer (ch. xx.). Job to Zophar: passes

from his own suffering to a general questioning of the righteous government of the world (ch. xxi.).

THIRD STAGE.

1. Eliphaz to Job: charges him with blasphemy, and exhorts him to return to a better mind (ch. xxii.). Job to Eliphaz: would fain appeal to God, but He hides Himself, and misery and misgovernment seem to prevail everywhere (ch. xxiii., xxiv.).
2. Bildad to Job: a very brief assertion of the majesty of God and the insignificance and evil of man (ch. xxv.). A last, straggling shot; the friends are silent henceforth, and the third part of the colloquy is broken off abruptly.

Job's Monologue (ch. xxvi.–xxxi.).

May be divided into two parts, the first ending with ch. xxviii., which is of the nature of an episode in praise of Wisdom. The later chapters contain a full account of Job's earlier days of happiness and a final appeal in vindication of his own integrity, and expressing a desire for judgment.

Intervention of Elihu (ch. xxxii.–xxxvii.).

A fresh speaker is here introduced in a few lines of prose. After a long exordium, Elihu expresses his dissatisfaction with the utterances of the friends, and more in detail with the attitude taken up by Job. He reproves Job for self-righteousness, and dwells at some length upon the educating power of suffering. God is both almighty and all-righteous, it is for man to submit and learn by His chastisements.

Appearance of Jehovah (ch. xxxviii.–xli.).

At this stage God "answers Job out of the whirlwind." His address is divided into two parts, the second beginning with ch. xl. 1. The former part describes the glories of creation, earth and sea, light and darkness, rain and snow, stars and lightnings. Then follows a graphic description of animal life, goats and deer, wild asses and wild oxen, peacock and ostrich, and especially of the war-horse. The latter part of the address consists of a more elaborate description of two monstrous creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan, the hippopotamus and the crocodile.

Job's Submission (ch. xlii. 1–6).

In a few pregnant sentences Job acknowledges his grave errors, the rashness and impatience of his former words, and humbles himself under the mighty hand of God, whom now he sees as he had never seen Him before.

EPILOGUE, ch. xlii. 7–17 (*in prose*). God pronounces sentence, the friends are censured, Job is accepted, and restored to double his former prosperity. He lives an hundred and forty years after his troubles were over, and dies "old and full of days."

On this outline a few remarks are necessary before the contents of the book can be considered as fully before the mind of the reader.

1. Is the book to be understood as strictly historical, or is it a work of imagination, or partly one and partly the other? Both amongst the

Jews and during the earlier centuries of Christendom the book was for the most part viewed as a veritable history. Here and there doubts were expressed, as by certain Rabbis and a few Christian teachers, of whom Theodore of Mopsuestia may stand as an example; but for the most part it was held that if "Job" were not history, it could be esteemed only as a fraud on the part of the writer. In modern times, however, neither of these extreme views has prevailed. Most modern interpreters hold that on a basis of historical fact the writer has built up an imaginative poem dealing with the question of the sufferings of the righteous and their justification under the government of a righteous God. Few are disposed to treat the whole story as a fiction. The historical reference to Job in Ezek. xiv. 14 (not to mention Jas. v. 11) points to the existence of a well-known tradition. On the other hand, it is hardly conceivable that the author intended the scenes in heaven of ch. i. and ii. to be interpreted literally, or meant it to be understood that the long addresses of ch. xxxviii.–xli. came directly as a voice from the skies. The numbers used in the prologue and epilogue are evidently symbolical and ideal. It is unlikely that the calamities described in ch. i. should fall with the dramatic suddenness and regularity that is there described,

precisely one survivor only in each case being left to tell the tale. Further, the character of the speeches of Job and his friends is tolerably conclusive. Never did sufferer *in extremis* compose such elaborate poetical deliverances, or a number of friends met to condole with him express themselves extemporaneously in sentences and images suggestive of the greatest skill of constructive genius. The names of Job and his friends and the leading facts of the story may well be historical, but the form is undoubtedly due to the writer, and in all probability the whole conception of the argument is his, though, instead of using an imaginary case, he uses the name and some incidents of the history of a well-known patriarch, idealising and adapting the details in order the more forcibly to point the moral and spiritual lessons he wished to draw. A sacred writer may for such a purpose use history, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews does in his eleventh chapter: he may, if he will, use parable, as our Lord so often did, or Nathan in his attempt to arouse the slumbering conscience of David. Or he may, with equal propriety, use the substance of history cast into a poetical and ideal form; and this appears to have been the method of the author of the Book of Job.

2. It seems to be of little use to discuss the

question whether the poem is dramatic, or epic, or tragic, or didactic. It was not composed to fit the measuring-lines of pedants. "Soul is form, and doth the body make." The inspired writer had a work to do, and did it in his own fashion, and neither the category "drama" nor "tragedy" nor "parable," nor any other suggesting Greek or English compositions of later date, precisely fits the case. The important element in the book is the spiritual convictions which animated the writer, for the full expression of which he used history and allegory in the prologue, dramatic elements—though without movement and action—in the body of the poem, and narrative again at the close. Drama it is not; dramatic poem it may, perhaps, be called; sublime book of God, shedding perennial light on the unending drama of suffering humanity, it unquestionably remains.

3. The book must be taken as a whole, studied as a whole, and interpreted as a whole. The grounds for questioning whether more than one hand has been engaged in its composition will be examined later. But the book as it stands constitutes one in the sacred Canon, and the interpreter, taking it as it has come down to us, must give to each part its due, and no more than its due place. The prologue contains two elements: an earthly history, and a representation of Divine

providential arrangements, couched in symbolical form. It must be taken as part of the hypothesis, therefore, that Job was a man of the high and virtually spotless character therein described, and that he was overwhelmed by a series of calamities, permitted by the providence of God as part of a higher purpose in which other beings than man are concerned. But it must not be assumed that the whole explanation is found here. These chapters are a part, but they are only a part of a larger whole.

Job's steadfastness under affliction must be fully taken into account. He endures one severe, and as men would say, intolerable trial after another, but no hasty or complaining word escapes his lips. The vehement outburst of ch. iii. is a wail of anguish, not an angry complaint. Job's marvellous resignation must be allowed its proper weight in our estimate of the whole contents of the book.

But no more than its proper weight. In the colloquies that follow, Job is not patient, his outcries are unrestrained, and sometimes become wild and passionate. In some chapters we see depicted the very opposite of the qualities with which the patriarch is proverbially credited. It is to be observed, however, that this is in his arguments with the three friends. These are represented as

sincere sympathisers, but as advocates of the current and generally accepted theory that man's sin and suffering on earth exactly correspond. The wicked are punished, the righteous rewarded; and conversely, those who suffer are evil, and the only way to the restoration of happiness and prosperity is to repent of sin and be reconciled to God. It is in answering this line of argument that Job's spirit is roused. Some advance is visible in the three several stages of the colloquy. At first the friends are comparatively moderate and general in their statements, and Job confines himself to vehement assertions of his own innocence, and lamentations over sufferings which to him are mysterious and unintelligible. But at a later stage the friends directly charge Job with ungodliness, and Job, questioning altogether the righteousness of the government of the world as we see it, casts about for some higher solution of the problem. The third stage represents the friends as becoming exhausted, though persisting as strenuously as ever in their contentions, while Job at greater length asserts and reinforces his former position.

Elihu's intervention must be considered as an episode, but not one without meaning or relevance. He states the controversy afresh, and sheds some new light upon it by insisting more clearly and

emphatically upon the remedial and educative influence of adversity.

And, not to linger over every part of the poem, the addresses of the Almighty, while undoubtedly of the nature of a sentence or judgment, must have their due place—no more, no less—in the larger whole. So also with the epilogue. It describes the end of the history, but not necessarily contains its whole explanation. It can no more be passed over by the student of the book than set forth as the point and climax of the whole composition. There is some danger of losing the due sense of proportion in viewing the various parts of the picture, and this can only be avoided by a survey of the whole contents of the book, in which each part is made to fit into its place.

4. Occasional obscurities need not, and must not be suffered to hide the view of the book as a whole. It is easy to raise questions concerning the meaning to be attached to the "sons of God" and the whole scene describing the council of heaven in ch. ii. It is often difficult to trace the exact connexion of thought in the speeches of Job and his friends. The language of the poem gains much of its force and vividness through a brevity which to us sometimes becomes obscurity; and critics may discuss without limit the soundness of the text or the integrity of the book. But

none of these things need interfere with that view of the whole which it is desirable every reader should gain for himself. We have been obliged to content ourselves here with the briefest analysis; but had it been possible to present a full paraphrase and explanation of the various parts, it would still be necessary for the student to make his own, if not direct from the Hebrew, then from the best English translation procurable.[1] To see with his own eyes is absolutely necessary for the student of nature, and the first thing needful for the student of Job is to read the book over and over again for himself, till the vision of the whole and the proportion of the parts is, in spite of occasional obscurities, clear before his eyes. Only Scripture that filters steadily and completely through the mind will mould the character and influence the life.

[1] The Revised Version is more useful in the Book of Job than in any other part of the Bible. The Authorised Version, though here as everywhere noble, is in places faulty and unintelligible. Dr. Cox's translation in his *Commentary on the Book of Job* will be found helpful to the English reader. Dr. A. B. Davidson's Notes (Cambridge Bible) are invaluable.

CHAPTER III.

THE BOOK OF JOB: ITS AGE AND AUTHORSHIP.

THE age in which this book was written is extremely doubtful, and its author is entirely unknown. Such a statement might seem to render the following chapter superfluous. But it by no means follows that an inquiry into the subject is useless; it may be possible to determine these questions within certain limits, and the process of investigation will bring to light many important characteristics of the book itself.

The history of critical opinion does not help us far towards a conclusion. Early Jewish teachers, as represented by certain passages in the Talmud, assigned a very early date to the Book of Job, and conjecture gave Moses as its author. A long line of Christian writers, reaching down to Ebrard (1858) and Canon Rawlinson (1891), have followed in the same direction. Others have held that early traditions, orally handed down from generation to generation, were shaped in their present

form about the time of Solomon (*e.g.* Delitzsch, Canon Cook, and Dr. S. Cox). The tendency in recent times, however, has been to assign a still later date to its composition, the majority of modern commentators, amongst whom Ewald, Renan, and Dr. Watson may be mentioned, inclining to a period after the captivity of the Northern tribes, somewhere between Isaiah and Jeremiah; whereas others, represented by Dr. A. B. Davidson and Canon Driver, date it after the Exile; Canon Cheyne apparently inclining to the later Persian period, in the fourth century before Christ. Professor Margoliouth, in the new edition of Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, holds that the argument from the parallel passages points decidedly in this direction. Such division of opinion is not encouraging. But instead of following the views of any individual or school of critics, it will be more satisfactory to present as succinctly as possible some of the main grounds on which the decision of the question rests, it being clearly understood that only an approximate judgment is from the nature of the case possible.

The first aspect of the book is undoubtedly primitive and non-Israelitish. It was said above that it contains hardly any allusions to Mosaic laws or observances. There is no mention of the

great events of the history of Israel, the Exodus, the Wanderings, the Conquest of Canaan, the annals of the kingdom. The names of God for the most part used are such as belonged to patriarchal times, *El* and *Eloah* being the oldest Semitic titles of the Divine Being. *Eloah* is used some fifty times in the Book of Job, hardly twenty times in all the rest of the Old Testament. The characteristic covenant-name of Jehovah is found in the prologue and epilogue, but in the body of the poem it hardly occurs at all (see, however ch. xxxviii. 1, xl. 1). The civilisation of later times is conspicuous by its absence. Wealth consists in flocks and herds; such communities as exist are of a primitive type (see ch. xxix.); Job himself offers sacrifice, a "burnt-offering" of the earliest kind; the uncoined money (Heb. *Kesita*) mentioned in ch. xlii. 11 is very ancient, as are the musical instruments, the tambourine and pipe, of ch. xxi. 12, xxx. 31. Such allusions as are found appear to be only to the building of early monuments like the Pyramids (iii. 14), the Flood (xxii. 16), and the destruction of the cities of the plain (xviii. 15). The extreme longevity of Job forms part of an undeniably patriarchal picture. It is contended, moreover, that the language of the book is archaic,—it is certainly full of Aramaisms, the exact nature of which requires close

examination, — and the style is said to be "a lapidary style, such as might befit an age and country when writing, though known, was not commonly used; when language full of life and power had not as yet attained to the clearness, fluency, and flexibility which characterise a later age."[1]

The question, however, arises whether the age of Job is to be understood as the same as that of the author. The above are features of primitive times: are they beyond the power of a skilful writer of later date to conceive and represent, supposing him to be embodying early traditions concerning Job in a poem admittedly of a very high order, in which the problems of a later time are discussed? Dr. Davidson says that the features of a much later time may be perceived "beneath this patriarchal disguise." that the author "is a true Israelite and betrays himself to be so at every turn, however great his power of reanimating the past," and that it is only uncritical minds that will be deceived by the "thin antique colour of the book." He concludes that Job is "the genuine outcome of the religious life and thought of Israel, the product of a religious knowledge and experience possible among no other people," and not possible in Israel till the

[1] Canon Cook, Introduction to *Speaker's Commentary*, p. 12.

later stages of its history. The close examination of this question is evidently no matter of mere antiquarian criticism, but it will take us to the very heart of the book itself. Let us therefore see upon what its determination depends.

It is urged that occasional references to the law are to be traced in such passages as "Thou hast taken pledges of thy brother for nought" (xxii. 6 and xxiv. 9), and "Thou shalt pay thy vows" (xxii. 27), as well as in the mention of the removal of landmarks (xxiv. 2), and of some kind of judicial procedure in the case of "an iniquity to be punished by the judges" (xxxi. 11). The mention of "the gate adjoining the city," and the seat in the "street" or open market-place (xxix. 7), is thought to point to settled life in a long inhabited country; while the repudiation of idolatry in ch. xxxi. 26 shows a certain coincidence with the language of Deut. iv. 19. It is clear, however, that no very strong case can be built upon a few passages like these, when set against the strong argument from silence, derived from the fact that these are the most explicit references to the law and usages of Israel that can be adduced.

It is further urged that the descriptions of misery and oppression contained here and there in the book point to a condition of social disorder

quite distinct from Job's personal troubles. In ch. ix. 24 we read—

> Lands are given into the hand of the wicked:
> [God it is who] covereth the faces of their rulers;
> If it be not He, who then is it?

The city is as bad as the country—

> From out the populous city men groan,
> And the soul of the wounded crieth out,
> Yet God regardeth not the wrong!—(xxiv. 12.)

Again, when it is said "He leadeth away counsellors stripped of their robes, and maketh judges fools" (xii. 17), the writer appears to have in view nations and statesmen of high civil rank: the language, says Canon Driver, "points to nations overthrown; the plans of statesmen wrecked; kings, princes, and priests led into exile." The whole passage, ch. xii. 16–25, does indeed point to a more fully developed national life than obtained in the patriarchal age, but it requires some reading between the lines to find in the simple language of the text any explicit reference to the national politics of later times, when (say) Assyria intervened in the affairs of Palestine and Syria.

The argument from language is one that it is difficult to press very far. The facts are that the body of the poem (excluding the Elihu section

which will be dealt with separately) is marked by a large number of words with Aramaic and Arabic affinities, quite sufficient to give it a linguistic character of its own. The difficulty arises when we begin to infer a date from this unquestioned phenomenon. One writer says that these peculiarities are marks of an "antique and highly poetic style"; another, that they may be accounted for by a very early date, the words in question being common to various Semitic dialects, or a very late one, the words being borrowed from closer intercourse with the Syrians; while a third, equally distinguished for scholarship, thinks the peculiarity is unfavourable both to a very early and a very late date, and he accounts for the presence of peculiar words and idioms by the supposition that the writer lived in close contiguity to Aramaic and Arabic speaking peoples.[1] Of these the last appears the most probable hypothesis, but clearly the argument from language cannot be used as a primary determining element in the case.

The literary finish of the poem might seem to indicate a comparatively late date for its composition. The remarkable ability and power displayed in Job may to a large extent be

[1] Canon Cook, Dr. S. Cox (quoting "Rabbi" Duncan), and Dillmann are the three writers referred to, but other names might be mentioned in support of each view.

appreciated by an English reader, and literary critics of all ages have but one voice to describe the genius and versatility displayed by the writer. But some of its excellences can only be appreciated by a student of Hebrew, amongst these being the skill with which the parallel structure is used in arguments of considerable length, the beauty of the rhythm, and the fire and force of the language in its extreme condensation. It might fairly be urged that these qualities and the finish given to the whole work are characteristic of a mature stage of literary culture. On the other hand, there are no traces in the poem itself of that tameness which marks (for example) certain psalms known to be of post-Exilic date. The originality of the author is perhaps the most marked feature of his style, and his figures of speech, both in their conception and their expression, by no means belong to the "silver age" of a national literature. Dante was the father of Italian poetry, the first great writer in the vernacular of his country, yet the *Divina Commedia* comes forth well-nigh perfect in the force and vividness of its conceptions and the vigorous ring of its compact and sonorous verses, struck off as by a single stroke of the hand of a master.

The comparison of parallel passages is proverbially a dubious argument. Sometimes it may be

possible to establish priority of date by this means, but usually it is exceedingly difficult to determine on which side the dependence lies. A tolerably clear instance is found in Job vii. 17 compared with Ps. viii. 4—

> What is man, that Thou dost magnify him,
> And set Thine heart upon him?
> That Thou shouldest visit him morning by morning,
> And try him moment by moment?

There can be little doubt that in this case the passage in Job is the later of the two; the simple adoration of the psalmist being echoed in bitter irony by the righteous man in the anguish of his multiplied calamities. But the date of the Psalm is not undisputed, though it is probably Davidic. Again, there is an undoubted parallel between Job xiv. 11 and Isa. xix. 5. One of these writers must have had the other passage before him, and Dr. Davidson is perhaps justified in arguing that the priority rests with Isaiah. In comparing Job iii. 3–10 with Jer. xx. 14–18 it is not so easy to decide, but the passage in Job is unquestionably the more forcible and vivid of the two, and that may argue priority of date. The parallels with Proverbs (comp. Job xviii. 5, 6 with Prov. xiii. 9, and Job xv. 7 with Prov. viii. 25, also Job xxviii. with Proverbs generally) appear to be in favour of an earlier date for Proverbs, while the

passages which show similarity of thought between Job and the second part of Isaiah are numerous, but quite inconclusive of relative date, when studied only as literary parallels.[1] By far the strongest argument for a comparatively late date for the Book of Job, and one which of itself is almost conclusive, is the nature of its subject-matter. The historical allusions by themselves are not decisive: the finish and elaboration of the poem might be considered compatible with an early age; occasional touches might be ascribed to an editor rather than to the author. But there is one characteristic about which there can be no question, which does not depend upon the interpretation of a few obscure passages, but which is interwoven with the whole texture of the book: it is the stage of religious thought which has been reached by the writer, the nature of the moral problems discussed, and the way in which they are handled. Considerations of this general kind will not of course enable us to fix the date within a century, but they give us excellent indication

[1] Examples may be found in Davidson's *Job*, pp. 66, 67. They are such as these: Job ix. 28 compared with Isa. xliv. 24–28; Job xxvi. 12 with Isa. li. 9, 10; Job xiii. 28 with Isa. l. 9; and the general similarity between Job and the suffering Servant of Jehovah. See also Canon Cheyne's Essay on "Job and the Second Part of Isaiah," in his *Prophecies of Isaiah*, vol. ii. p. 235.

of the period within which such a book could be written by an Israelite. For that it is essentially Israelitish there can be little question. The whole cast of thought, a number of minute characteristics, and the place of the book in the Jewish canon are sufficient proofs of this. It must then be borne in mind that the religious position of the writer *presupposes* very much. It presupposes the belief in one God, distinctly ethical in His nature and attributes; a belief in an overruling Providence and a moral government of the world; a creed, generally accepted, that sin entails suffering, and that the righteous are rewarded in the present life; a somewhat developed psychology and view of the nature of man, and a highly spiritual doctrine of God; it presupposes, further, sufficient time—a tolerably long period is necessary—for the general theories of individual and national prosperity and adversity to be accepted and tested in practice; it presupposes the growth of questioning on these subjects, not merely the beginnings of doubt and occasional denial of the prevailing creed, but a certain *maturity* of speculation on the great theme of a theodicy, the justifying of the ways of God to men. Hints of this kind of questioning, which, when it is once raised, cannot be easily silenced, are found in certain psalms, such as the 37th and

the 73rd. But it is impossible to deny that the Book of Job represents this mood of the human mind—together with the light of Divine revelation upon it—in a remarkably advanced form. Now, without limiting the power of the Spirit of God, or forgetting that men of insight and genius, not to say inspired writers, are often in advance of their times, we may well draw a general argument for the date of Job from the kind of discussion which its great moral and spiritual problems are found to receive. "The elements doubtless of such perplexities may have existed from the day when the blood of some unavenged successor of righteous Abel cried in vain for retribution. But we can hardly imagine that their full and elaborate discussion would have found voice or echo or hearing, still less enshrined itself in a nation's sacred literature, till a sadder and more perplexing experience had opened men's eyes to darker and more tangled thoughts than come to the childhood of nations. . . . Great and lofty as are the utterances, profound as are the thoughts of the Book of Job, they would have, may we not say, been "born out of due time," till the problems with which they deal had been brought home to the hearts of thinkers by familiarity with much unexplained and inexplicable suffering, by long and painful musing over the mysteries and riddles

of human life."[1] The argument founded upon these general considerations may be strengthened at a later stage, when the scope and purpose of the book are considered; meanwhile it is, within its own limits, well-nigh conclusive against the earlier dates that have been suggested for the composition of the book.

It is possible, however, to draw a little closer to the determination of our problem. The mention of Ophir and the gold of Ophir (xxii. 24, xxviii. 16) seems to mark the Solomonic period as the earliest possible assignable date, while the mention of Satan in the prologue gives a further indication of limit at the other end. The 1st and 2nd chapters of Job were certainly written later than that describing the "lying spirit" in 1 Kings xxii. 21–23. In all probability they were written earlier than the only other passages in which Satan is mentioned by name, 1 Chron. xxi. 1 and Zech. iii. In 1 Chronicles the word is used without the article, evidently marking a later stage than its use with the article in Job and Zechariah. A close comparison of the two latter passages, and the way in which the work of the "Adversary" is regarded, makes it decidedly

[1] Dean Bradley, *Lectures on the Book of Job*, p. 172. One of the most practically serviceable volumes in the whole literature of the subject for the general English reader.

probable that Job i. and ii. is the earlier of the two. If these arguments be valid, our view is narrowed down to a period somewhere between 1000 and 500 B.C. Of the three several epochs which have most commended themselves to scholars, (1) the Solomonic, (2) the post-Exilic, and (3) a period after the captivity of the Northern tribes, somewhere between Isaiah and Jeremiah, in the seventh century before Christ, the last appears to us for several reasons the most probable. Job was in our view written later than the parts of Proverbs which belong to the age of Solomon. It was written earlier than the chapters of the second part of Isaiah, which describe the Servant of God as suffering vicariously for the sins of the people. It may have been written by a Northern Israelite, and must have been written by one familiar with the life of the countries bordering upon the Syrian and Arabian deserts—a life which we know to have changed but little through the lapse of hundreds, and even thousands of years. Nearer than this to a determination of the question of the age and authorship of Job it is impossible to go. Even so much is far from being proved. It is given here as representing the impression produced upon at least one careful student of the book. But the opinion of the best authorities at the present time tends to narrow down the issue

to a choice between the period just specified and that post-Exilic period to which some critics appear disposed without sufficient warrant to relegate nearly the whole of Jewish sacred literature.

There remains still to be considered the important question of the integrity of the book. Analysis has been prevalent here as everywhere. The book has been taken to pieces by successive critics, and this, that, or the other portion has been pronounced not to form part of the original composition. The prologue and epilogue have been supposed to be later additions. The speeches of Elihu have been assailed on all hands as an interpolation. The addresses of the Almighty, especially the chapters describing behemoth and leviathan, have been condemned as due to a later hand. The colloquies themselves, which form the body of the poem, have been asserted to be composite, certain passages being rejected as interfering with the progress of the argument or inconsistent with its general drift. On one ground and another the several portions of the book have been assailed by critical analysts, till the magnificent poem which has fascinated literary as well as religious students in all ages seems in danger of being set down as a mere curious conglomerate, a botched and clumsy piece of workmanship, due to a succession of unintelli-

gent commentators and would-be emendators of a scanty original text.

In the latest critical edition of the text of the Old Testament, Professor Siegfried of Jena publishes the Book of Job printed in four colours, to indicate the various elements of which in his judgment it is composed. Some passages are styled "polemical interpolations directed against the tendency of the poem." These are printed in green, and may be represented by ch. xxviii. and the Elihu speeches, ch. xxxii.–xxxvii. Others, found in the 12th, 27th, and other chapters, are "correcting interpolations, conforming the speeches of Job to the orthodox doctrine of retribution," and are printed in red. Others, being "parallel compositions," are printed in blue, and among these is found ch. xl. 6–xlii. 6. Some fifty separate passages are banished from the text as interpolations, and appear only in footnotes, while the shorn remnant of the text is rearranged according to the editor's judgment. Another learned scholar [1] has undertaken to reconstruct the whole work by aid of the Sahidic version and his own views of the metre in which he believes the poem to have been originally written. Both these

[1] Professor Bickell, a sketch of whose views, with a translation of the "original poem" of Job, appeared in the *Contemporary Review* for July 1893.

critical theories are founded upon the view that the primitive poem was too bold in its outbursts of poetic passion for the religious opinions of orthodox Jews, who accordingly toned it down and modified it to suit the conventional creed of later days. Professor Cheyne, also, gives a similar description of what appears to him to have been the "gradual growth of the book," which in its present form is like a "very confused theodicy," but when the "disturbing elements" are removed, it is seen to be "simply an expression of the conflicting thoughts of an earnest, warm-hearted man on the great question of suffering."[1]

It forms no part of our purpose to enter into detailed argument upon such questions as these. But it is impossible to form a well-founded judgment on the subject of this chapter without being at least acquainted with the prevailing views of leading scholars, and either intelligently accepting them or for good reasons rejecting them. The simple answer, then, to such destructive criticism as has just been described — which might be elaborated and supported by argument did space permit—is (1) that such methods of "reconstruction" are subjective and arbitrary, for the most

[1] *Job and Solomon;* see the section on the "Purpose of Job as illustrated by Criticism," pp. 66–70.

part unsupported by external evidence,[1] and capable of being set aside to-morrow by a fresh set of critics with canons of their own. (2) The poem as thus presented, beginning with ch. iii. and containing only portions of the colloquies, selected from ch. iv.–xxxi., is literally one "without head or tail," without beginning or ending, without adequate cause or sufficient explanation. (3) There is no sufficient ground of objection against any of the leading sections of the poem,—the objections may be met *seriatim*,—nor any linguistic or other reason for supposing that the idea of the book has been modified, except the views of uniformity and consistency held by latter-day critics. But (4) an exception must be made in the case of the Elihu section (ch. xxxii.–xxxvii.), which may be eliminated without the slightest disturbance of the rest; and (5) there are difficulties concerning shorter sections, *e.g.* ch. xxvii. 7–23 and xxviii., which would need to be dealt with separately, as on different grounds it is very difficult to fit them in in the place where they stand.

[1] It is impossible to discuss here the question of the relation of the LXX. and other versions to the Hebrew text. Professor Bickell, Dr. Hatch, and others hold that the LXX., with its many omissions, represents an earlier type of text.

Without troubling the reader with the details of a technical discussion, it may be enough to say that in the writer's opinion all the difficulties may be surmounted except those which refer to the Elihu section. In every case it is a balance of probabilities, and in this particular part of the poem, and this part only, the balance appears to incline against the view that these chapters formed part of the original poem. And this, for the following reasons:—(1) Elihu is unknown both to the prologue and epilogue of the poem, his speeches interrupt the course of the argument without need or advantage, and the excision of these chapters would involve not the slightest mutilation of a composition which without them is an organic whole. (2) The second argument is linguistic, and rests upon differences of style, vocabulary, and other details which are generally admitted by critics, but which would not of themselves be sufficient to establish a difference of authorship. (3) The subject-matter of Elihu's speeches confuses rather than clears up the course of the poem. He condemns both the friends and Job, yet himself covers over again much of the ground already covered. So far as there is freshness or originality in the expressions put into the mouth of Elihu, they belong to a different treatment of the great problem of the book from that

which is presented by the consistent outline of its argument when they are removed.

Answers have been furnished to all these arguments, such as to many minds may prove amply sufficient. It would answer little end to set in array a number of authorities, though even amongst conservative critics a large number are found accepting the view above propounded. Intelligent and devout study of the book itself need not be disturbed by the decision of the question for or against the genuineness of the Elihu section. If these chapters do not form part of the original poem, they were added not long after its composition by a spiritual-minded Jew, who desired to bring out certain aspects of the great problem of the suffering of the righteous which he thought had not been sufficiently dwelt upon in the book as he found it. These thoughts may be reverently studied side by side with the rest, in the same way that we should compare the teaching (say) of certain psalms or proverbs, or prophetic writings which touched upon the important theme that exercises anew almost every generation of mankind. This combination of elements proceeding from different authors into one composition obtained in early times and in Eastern countries to an extent which Westerns of a later date hardly appreciate. This feature of compilation is more

frequent in the Old Testament than the superficial reader is disposed to believe. It may easily be shown to exist in the historical and to some extent in the prophetical books. There are traces of redaction in the Psalms; the Book of Proverbs is, upon the very face of it, a compilation; and if in Job there be a trace or two of composite structure, we need not be surprised. But there is nothing brought to light by sober and well-founded criticism which need disturb the student of a poem which in its main features is as remarkable for its unity of purpose as for the boldness of some of its speculations, and the power and beauty of its religious teaching as a whole. If one of the subordinate figures or some details of the grouping in this august and impressive picture prove to be by a later hand than that which painted the great whole, neither our admiration nor our moral and spiritual edification need be diminished. In this unique poem God teaches all willing disciples a series of lessons which in a succeeding chapter it will be our business to unfold.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOOK OF JOB: ITS POETRY.

IT is the object of the following chapter to dwell solely upon the literary characteristics of this wonderful book. In so doing, it must not be forgotten that these are entirely subordinate features. The writer was throughout under the influence of the Spirit of God. His thoughts were spiritual, his end was the Divine glory. He was not thinking of the splendour of his images, the embellishment of his diction, the elaboration of his sublime delineations. His was "the poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling," but its glance was not from "heaven to earth, from earth to heaven," it was fixed on objects beyond the earth, while the poet's pen used with a lavish freedom, sometimes with a splendid abandonment, all its wealth of earthly figures to adorn and emphasise the thoughts which moved his soul to its very depths. This being borne in mind, a more minute study of the poetry of the Book of

Job will enable the reader to enter upon the deeper study of its central theme which will follow.

The first two chapters and the last are in prose. But a poet's prose has characteristics of its own, and the opening and closing sketches are written with the skill which disdains to use many strokes of the pencil. The eye of the writer sees clearly and truly from the first, and he makes the reader see not only Job in his prosperity and in his calamities, but the mysterious significance of the council held in heaven, with a power which belongs only to the highest art, that of perfect simplicity. This is what Carlyle means in his eulogium of this "noble book; all men's book! All in such free, flowing outlines; grand in its sincerity, in its simplicity; in its epic melody and repose of reconcilement. There is the seeing eye, the mildly understanding heart. So *true* every way: true eyesight and vision for all things; material things no less than spiritual. . . . There is nothing written, I think, in the Bible or out of it, of equal literary merit." Consider for a moment the impressiveness of the picture—etched only in black and white, but how deeply and truly graven!—of the three friends who came to comfort Job and failed to recognise him: "But when they lifted up their eyes from afar

and knew him not, they lifted up their voice and wept; and they rent their mantles and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights; and none spake a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great." The silence of the writer, like the silence of the friends, is often more eloquent than speech.

The structure of Hebrew poetry does not readily lend itself to the composition of such a book as Job, and the victory of the writer over his somewhat intractable medium is remarkable. The distich with its two parallel clauses is admirably suited to the proverb. It may be enlarged to a tristich of three clauses, or even further modified, and such parallelism is not out of harmony with the strain of a lyric or didactic psalm. But for the sustained style of a laboured argument it is unsuited, and to maintain such a flight through a long poem without the flagging of a pinion—nay, often to tax the powers of a reader to keep pace with its swift and tireless movement—argues the powers of a master. The reader of the Revised Version who studies the structure of the verses will be enabled to discern in some measure what it needs a knowledge of Hebrew fully to appreciate.

It is not necessary to dwell upon what has

been called the dramatic skill of the writer. Dramatic power is not a leading feature of the poem. The characters of the three friends are indeed distinguished in spite of their general likeness to one another. Eliphaz, the oldest and wisest, is the most dignified and temperate in his speech. Zophar, the youngest, is the most vehement. Bildad fairly preserves the mean between the two, less noble and more emphatic than Eliphaz, but uttering the maxims of the sage with less violence and coarseness than Zophar. A progress also is observable in the dialogues. The friends become more pronounced as Job shows himself less amenable to their remonstrances. Job becomes more vehement as the friends show less sympathy with his troubles. The friends pass from vague generalising to personal rebuke, and Job passes from personal lamentations to angry complaints of the misgovernment of the world. The momentary appearance of Job's wife, who has received scant justice at the hands of the commentators, also illustrates the author's power of portraiture. Woman-like, she feels too keenly the sympathy of the moment to be able to enter upon abstract considerations of a higher kind. Her single utterance is not blasphemous, but wild and despairing, and is introduced to heighten the effect of Job's invincible patience and fidelity.

Elihu's speeches, again, have a character of their own; while the addresses put into the lips of the Almighty are clothed with sublimity.

But it is not in this direction that we are to look for the literary power and beauty of the poem. Job must not be judged as a drama, or it would be easy to complain of the slowness and heaviness of its movement and the intolerable length of its speeches. A reader who is in a hurry to get on cannot enter into the meaning of this high argument, a characteristic feature of which is its brooding intensity. We shall mark, illustrating at some length by examples, the passionate glow of feeling which makes the poem in some places almost to "melt with fervent heat"; the lofty character of the thought, matched by a corresponding loftiness of diction, the force being largely derived not from expansion and amplification, but from vigorous and intense concentration; and the variety, freshness, and wealth of imagery with which every chapter is enriched and illumined. Other characteristics which need not be specified will appear as we proceed.

The vehemence of feeling which characterises the book is unmistakable. Whether it be pity, indignation, scorn, or tenderness, every emotion is white-hot. The situation is tragic. The

calamities are unprecedented. The picture is heartrending. The problem is maddening. Such woes and such mental anguish are not to be described with calm, philosophic pen. Our first specimen of Wisdom-Literature calls for and exhibits more than the mild reflection of the sage; it demands and is informed by the passionate heart of the poet, dowered with "the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, the love of love." But it is not easy appropriately to express such intense feeling. The tragic actor usually rants, and the excited poet is apt to rave. But the Book of Job gives an unspeakably lofty expression to strong feeling of all kinds. Take a few illustrations almost at random. Job says in one place that he will indulge himself in freedom of complaint, he will not "curb his mouth," but will pour out the bitterness of his soul—

> Am I a sea, or a sea-monster,
> That Thou settest a watch upon me?
> When I say, "My couch shall comfort me,
> My bed may ease my pain,"
> Then Thou scarest me with dreams,
> And terrifiest me with visions:
> So that my soul chooseth strangling,
> And death rather than a life like this!
> I waste away; I shall not live on:
> Let me alone, for my days are a breath.
>
> —(vii. 12–16.)

Listen to his passionate pleading that the All-seeing Eye would turn away from him, the All-encompassing Hand would simply let him go! God visit man, and think of him, and tend him, and bestow care on him? Ah, if He would but spare Himself the trouble and simply let him perish!

> How long wilt Thou not look away from me,
> Nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle!
> If I have sinned, yet what have I done to Thee,
> O Thou Watcher of men?
> Why hast Thou set me up as a mark for Thee,
> So that I am become a burden to myself?
> —(vii. 19, 20.)

It is a bold thing to arraign God, but Job's passionate assertion of righteousness seems to pass all limits. He cries out that if he tries to brighten up a little (ix. 27) it is of no use, he knows that God will not relieve him, and this burden of calamity which rests upon him will write him down as guilty.

> Were I to wash myself with snow-water,
> And cleanse my hands with potash,
> Thou wouldest still plunge me into a ditch,
> So that my very clothes would abhor me.
> —(ix. 30, 31.)

There are many pictures scattered through the book describing the extremity of Job's pains and

calamities, but they are not drawn by a feeble aggregation of vaguely ambitious epithets. The force of the words is so great that it is apt to seem violent and overcharged in English. Take one instance only, in which the Divine Being who is apparently pouring out His wrath on Job is viewed as a giant Antagonist, who wrestles with and throws the poor feeble human frame, or who sets up the miserable man as a target, piercing him with wounds, and shedding his life-blood on the earth—

> I was at ease, but He shattered me;
> He seized me by the throat and shook me.
> He set me up as His mark,
> His arrows beset me.
> He cleaveth my side, and doth not spare;
> He sheddeth my gall upon the ground;
> He breaketh me with breach upon breach;
> He rusheth upon me like a giant.—(xvi. 12–14.)

When Job turns upon his friends, sometimes he can be bitter enough in his irony: "Truly ye are the people; the understanding of the whole race of mankind is bound up in your breasts, and when ye pass away, wisdom will die with you!" (xii. 2). But he can be just as tender and wistful in his pleading: "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me" (xix. 21). And again, with a

calm confidence he can wrap himself in the mantle of his conscious integrity, and his passionate outcries are exchanged for the strength and dignity of such words as these—

> If I have seen any perish for lack of clothing,
> Or the needy destitute of covering;
> If his loins have not blessed me,
> And he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep;
> If I have lifted my hand against the orphan,
> Because I knew the judges would favour me:
> Let my shoulder fall from its socket,
> And my arm be broken at the joint!
> For calamity from God was my dread,
> And because of His majesty I could not do [evil].
>
> —(xxxi. 19–23.)

But the graphic power of delineation does not appear only in the expression of intense feeling. The writer has been a close observer of nature. Probably he had travelled much, as travelling went in those days, but whether abroad or at home, he knew how to observe and how to tell what he had seen. His knowledge of natural history is wide and accurate for the times in which he lived. In ch. iv. 10, 11, five different words for lion are used: the tawny lion, the strong lion, the young lion, the lioness and her whelps are all distinguished. The wild ass whose home is in the wilderness and his haunt in the "salt waste," the ostrich hatching its eggs in the sand, and the

eagle spying her prey from the far craggy heights, carrying it through the air for her young to gorge their fill upon its blood,—for "*where the slain are, there is she*,"—are all described in ch. xxxix. with that lightness and sureness of touch which bespeaks the hand of a master. Here again is a figure suggested by scenes that must often have been present to the eyes of a dweller on the east of Jordan, amidst the gorges that come down from the mountain-side to the very borders of the desert. Job is describing his friends, who were not so much treacherous as disappointing, faithless, their promise of comfort mocking and misleading the thirsty traveller—

> My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a torrent,
> As a channel of torrents that vanish away;
> They are turbid with ice,
> And snow is dissolved in them:
> What time they wax warm, they vanish;
> When it is hot, they are dried up from their place.
> The caravans turn aside [to drink of them],
> They go up into the desert and perish.
> The caravans of Tema looked for them;
> The companies of Sheba hoped for them:
> They were ashamed because they had trusted;
> They came up to them, and were confounded
> with shame.—(vi. 15–20.)

In one of Bildad's speeches (ch. viii. 11, 12) a single clause touches on the need of water for the papyrus reed, which withers even while it is

luxuriantly green, if it is not supplied with perpetual and abundant moisture. So is it with the *âchu*, the technical name for the edible Nile-grass mentioned in Gen. xli. 2; both plants exemplifying the suddenness of the failure which overtakes the ungodly man unexpectedly in the very midst of his prosperity. What can be more graphic than the brief phrase of the following verse, "His trust is—a spider's web," lighter and more frail than the flimsy gossamer thread of a summer's morning, which an unconscious touch sweeps away? The succeeding verses contain another figure, more elaborately worked out. They describe the wicked man as a quickly growing bindweed, which seems securely fixed in its place, twining around the stones, but which with one pull may be dislodged, leaving no root or trace behind it.

> He swelleth with sap in the sunshine,
> And his shoots push forth over his garden.
> His roots twine about the mould,
> He looks down upon a house of stones.
> But if [God] destroy him from his place,
> It shall deny him, saying, I have not seen thee.
> —(viii. 16–19.)

Sometimes there is a wealth of meaning in a single phrase, the phrase of a poet, who condenses a picture into a word. In our own climate we

know occasionally the terrible binding power of a great frost, when the earth is iron and the breath freezes ere it pass from the nostrils, when every sound in the landscape is silenced and all human labour is stilled. But the author of Job gives us all this and more in the pregnant expression, "He *scaleth up* the hand of every man" (xxxvii. 7), when "the frost is given by the breath of God, and the broad waters are straitened." How exquisitely chosen is the single word which describes the skies and atmosphere of late spring and early summer, when the earth is warm and still under the breath of the south wind—"Dost thou know the *balancings* of the clouds," the delicate poise of the white fleecy vapours that lie and move lightly as the soft breeze plays upon them? Every reader of Ruskin will remember his description of the mysterious aspects of the clouds, the light mists of early morning, the ghost of a cloud waving like a woman's veil, the "war-clouds that gather on the horizon, dragon-crested, tongued with fire," the filmy crescent bent above the mountain summit, "poised as a white bird hovers over its nest."[1] But all the poet-painter's word-pictures lie wrapped up in the single line from Job, which he does not fail to quote, "Knowest thou the balancings of the clouds, the

[1] *Modern Painters*, vol. v. pt. vii. ch. i. § 2, 3.

wondrous works of Him which is perfect in knowledge?" The literature of all languages is full of metaphors to describe the swift flight of time, the *fugaces anni*, the rapid gliding away of which Horace laments to Postumus. Job pours out three in a breath: he sees the courier speeding across the desert, the reed skiffs shooting past on the stream, the darting of the eagle through the air—

> My days are swifter than a runner:
> They flit away, they see no good;
> They shoot by like skiffs of reed,
> Like an eagle that swoopeth upon its prey!
> —(ix. 25, 26.)

How plaintive and how picturesque is his plea for cessation of the sufferings which torture him, on the ground of his frailty and inability to stand for a moment before the blast of Divine wrath—

> Wilt Thou harass a driven leaf,
> And chase the withered stubble?—(xiii. 25.)

No less graphic is Eliphaz' picture of the arrogant self-confidence of the ungodly man who hardens himself against the Almighty, "running upon Him with stiffened neck, with the thick bosses of his shields." His face may be "covered with fatness" and his flanks with "collops of flesh," but there is no substance in his apparent

prosperity; he is but a puff of breath, and "at a puff of breath he shall pass away" (xv. 26, 27, 30).

The fine conceptions of the 28th chapter have been recognised in all ages, but for the English reader they have until lately been concealed under the obscure and sometimes quite unintelligible renderings of the Authorised Version. In the Revised Version these are for the most part removed, though the brevity of the original makes it occasionally obscure and always difficult to translate adequately. The description of the secrets of Wisdom, more inscrutable than the hidden recesses of the mines in which men search for treasures of gold and precious stones, is amongst the finest passages of all literature—

Man maketh an end of darkness,
And searcheth out to the farthest bound
The stones of thick darkness and of the shadow of death.
He sinketh a shaft far from the habitations of men,
He is forgotten of the feet of those who walk above,
He swings suspended afar from men.
The earth, out of which cometh bread,
Is stirred up underneath, as if by fire.
Its stones are the bed of the sapphire,
And contain dust of gold.
That path! no bird of prey knoweth it,
Nor hath the eye of the falcon gazed upon it;
The proud beasts have not trodden it,
Nor hath the fierce lion passed thereby.—(vers. 3-7.)

We must not transcribe the whole chapter, but every verse adds to the impressiveness of the description of man's irrepressible daring in searching out the secrets of nature, and prepares the way for the climax—

> But where shall Wisdom be found,
> And where is the place of understanding?
> The abyss saith, She is not in me,
> And the sea saith, She is not with me. . . .
> Destruction and Death say,
> We have but heard a rumour of her with our ears!

One there is who knows. God understandeth the way and the place of Wisdom. He who weighs the winds and measures out the waters, who makes a decree for the rain and a pathway for the lightning-flash through the riven air, He knows the abode which He Himself has assigned to this high Teacher, and He who knows has in due course revealed it—

> And unto man He said,
> Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom,
> And to depart from evil is understanding.

It may well seem a work of supererogation to point out the poetical sublimity of a book which is rich in passages like this. But the Book of Job is praised more than it is read. The beginning and the end are known, but the body

of the book is little studied and less understood. A little longer, then, it may be desirable to illustrate the subject of this chapter. Not so much by the quotation of passages which are on everyone's lips, like the description of the Arab war-horse in ch. xxxix., whose neck is "clothed with the quivering mane," who "laugheth at fear and turneth not back from the sword," who "drinketh up the ground" in the eagerness of his war-thirst, and who "cannot contain himself at the sound of the trumpet." Or the well-known description of the crocodile-leviathan, whose "strong scales are his pride, shut together as with a close seal," on whose "neck dwelleth Strength, and Terror danceth before him." Rather may we point out the sublimity and beauty of the conceptions of the universe, which this inspired poet of the early world can view as one organic whole long before physical science has taught the lesson, because he can discern the living Lord whose presence makes the unity of the Cosmos which He alone created and which He alone sustains.

> He commandeth the sun, and it shineth not;
> And setteth His seal upon the stars.
> Who alone spreadeth out the heavens,
> And treadeth upon the high places of the sea:
> The Maker of the Bear, the Giant, and the Cluster,
> And the hidden chambers of the South.—(ix. 7–9.)

The dweller under the nightly glories of the Eastern skies with their clear and silent stars had been awestruck by the sight, and when the Almighty is rebuking Job for his rash presumption, none of the questions are more unanswerable than this—

> Canst thou bind the links of the Cluster,
> Or loose the bands of the Giant?
> Canst thou lead forth the Constellations in their season,
> Canst thou guide the Bear and her offspring?
> —(xxxviii. 31, 32.)

Earth, as well as heaven, teaches the same lesson; for it takes its place in a celestial Order which man can no more comprehend than he can compass its trackless bounds.

> Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?
> . . . On what were its foundations fastened,
> Or who laid its corner-stone,
> When the morning stars sang together,
> And all the sons of God shouted for joy?
> —(xxxviii. 4–7.)

But hell itself must have its part in the message which the universe sounds in the ear of the humbled and helpless son of man. No conceivable part of it is beyond the ken of the Omniscient, no portion of it but lies in the hollow of the hand of the Almighty.

The Shades tremble
Deep below the waters and their inhabitants.
The Unseen World is naked before Him,
The Abyss of Destruction hath no covering.
He stretcheth out the North over the void,
And hangeth the earth upon nothing. . . .
The pillars of heaven tremble
And are amazed at His rebuke. . . .
Lo, these are but the outskirts of His ways:
And how small a whisper hath been heard of Him!
But the thunder of His power who can understand?
—(xxvi. 5, 6, 11, 14.)

It will be seen even from these selected examples that the author of the Book of Job exhibits the higher as well as the secondary qualities of the poet. The faculty of observation and the power of graphic detailed description is important in its place. When Job is complaining that God watches him so closely and marks all his sins, he says, "My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and Thou fastenest up my iniquity." When he is describing the happy piety of his earlier life, he tells how "God's lamp shone over his head," how he lived in the ripeness of his "autumn days" of rich and mellow fruitfulness, the favour and friendship of God resting like a pillar of cloud upon his tent; his "steps were bathed in milk, and the rocks poured me out rivers of oil!" What poetry as well as pathos there is in the picture of him who was eyes to

the blind and feet to the lame, who could say, "The dew lieth all night upon my branch, and my bow reneweth its spring in my hand" (xxix. 3, 4, 6, 19, 20). But touches such as these, which cause every speech to glisten with points of light, do not constitute a great poet, though they mark a true one. It is the loftiness of conception, the sweep of great thoughts through the mind, and the power to apprehend and embody them, which give Job such a high place in literature. The truth of this statement cannot be made fully good till we have examined the scope and purpose of the book. But enough has already been said to give presumptive evidence of what will be completely established in the next chapter.

And, lest it be thought that too much stress has here been laid upon the purely literary excellence of a book which is essentially sacred in character, let it be said in closing that these higher qualities are due to the religion of the writer, and that what Elihu calls "the breath of the Almighty" gave him this understanding. Many Oriental poems display some of the qualities we have been describing in this chapter. The Arab is picturesque in his ordinary speech. A profusion of metaphors is not necessarily ornamental. The larger scope, the loftier conceptions, the wider horizon, which distinguish Job, are due to the

religion which gave the writer such views of the physical universe as were altogether in advance of his age, and cause him to rank amongst the writers for all time. Of the moral and spiritual qualities which are the chief characteristics of the book it still remains to speak. But already it is plain that in its very atmosphere we breathe an "ampler ether, a diviner air," than any that pervades Babylonian, Arabic, Egyptian literature. The influence of the religion of Israel is already felt in the very conceptions of the universe which invest the diction of the writer with poetic power. The work of the Almighty in creating and sustaining the universe as a marvellously ordered whole occupies but a secondary place, though a very glorious one, in the outlook of the writer upon the life around him. The Spirit of God had taught him thus far, but there were deeper and harder lessons to be learned in the complex life of man. As yet "how small a whisper" have we heard of Him! When the "thunder of His mighty deeds" sounds through the startled air, will it be possible for us to understand, or shall we be stunned and deafened by its roar?

CHAPTER V.

THE BOOK OF JOB: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION.

THE Book of Job is "all men's book." For it deals with questions which have urged and vexed generation after generation, old problems which men are continually grappling with, as if none had ever known them before—questions as old as man's first disobedience, problems as ancient as the sorrow and suffering it brought in its train. The subject of the book, as all know, is not the punishment of the wicked, but the suffering of the righteous. But when we begin to ask questions concerning the government of the world and the meaning of history, we find them multiply on our hands. The untying of one knot only brings us face to face with another. The enigma of life cannot be solved in a single answer.

Thus the Book of Job furnishes points of contact with many of the masterpieces of secular literature. So many great minds have wrestled with the ultimate problems of human life, tried

to lift the veil of Isis and answer the riddle of the Sphinx. Why are we here? How is the world governed and the life of man ordered? Is the Ruling Power righteous? Why does evil prosper so often and so long, while the upright and the good are bowed under the yoke of suffering to the bitter end? Is "prosperity," is "happiness," our being's end and aim? If not, why do we so desire it? If so, why is it not always the portion of those who love truth and seek righteousness? If the world's balance now hangs awry, will it ever be adjusted, and when and how? These questions have been asked in the most various forms, and have received the most various answers. Æschylus propounds some of them, as Prometheus is being chained to his lonely rock by the myrmidons of the tyrant Zeus, there to suffer in proud anguish for having striven to benefit mankind and its "new" ruler. Plato gives one answer to these questions in his Protagoras, another in his Gorgias, and evidently is satisfied with neither. Shakespeare suggests many such questions, and in "Hamlet" shows how a noble mind may be overthrown by an attempt to carry their too intolerable burden. The Stoic of ancient days had his answer ready, and gave men the useless advice to harden their hearts against human feeling. The Epicurean had his

answer, and as uselessly bade them hold themselves aloof from all that would stir their hearts with any emotions more tumultuous than the true philosophic moderation. Goethe's Faust in form somewhat imitates Job, and represents an essentially modern reading of the drama of man's efforts and aspirations, "infinite passion, and the pain of finite hearts that yearn"; while Byron and Shelley represent varying phases of the undisciplined human spirit in bold and futile revolt against conditions which it impotently resists because it will not take the only right way to understand them.

Has the Bible no special message for these dark moods and ineffectual struggles of man? Its whole message is a gospel, intended to free him from the bonds which are the real cause of his misery and restlessness, but has it no special message addressed to the human mind in its moments of sternest self-questioning and inward torment? The answer is found in the Book of Job. It does not stand quite alone, as we shall see, in the sacred Scriptures. The 42nd chapter is appropriately appointed in the Anglican liturgy for St. Thomas' Day. Some of the Psalms, some parts of the Prophets, contain balm for the aching wounds of the sceptic and the despairing. But there is no part of the Bible in which there is at the same time such a reflection of man's darkest

and most hopeless moods and an indication of the path by which he may grope his way to the light. For the fullest light it was needful that the Old Testament saint should be content to wait, and believers in Christ are never content to stay long upon the level of the Book of Job. But that book has a unique place and a special value of its own in a volume which contains also the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the Epistles of St. Paul. What that place and value are will soon appear.

There are certain presuppositions which must be borne in mind, conditions which indicate the exact nature and pressure of the problem raised in Job. Israel stood almost alone among the nations in upholding the existence of a purely ethical Deity, a true Moral Governor of the world. Other nations worshipped Force, either nakedly presented or under some decent covering; while sometimes Evil itself, in grosser or less pronounced forms, sat in their mythologies enthroned for men to acknowledge in foul rites and yet fouler obedience. The chosen nation stood alone to witness to a God "abundant in goodness and truth." A special covenant had been made with Israel, bearing special promises and sanctions; and the burden of the message which one man of God after another was commissioned to deliver was this: "If ye hearken and obey, ye shall eat

the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword, for the mouth of Jehovah hath spoken it." This was a national promise, but the general tenor of the covenant was the same throughout. "The curse of Jehovah is in the house of the wicked: but He blesseth the habitation of the just." This was the charter of family life, and for individuals the principle was substantially the same. "The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell therein for ever: as for transgressors, they shall be destroyed together; the latter end of the wicked shall be cut off." This was the traditional teaching of law-givers, wise men, and prophets, the "orthodoxy" of Judaism for centuries together. That it was the whole teaching either of law or of prophets is not asserted, but it was a ruling principle accepted more or less as an axiom by the pious Israelite.

But is it true? That was a question which pious Israelites were certain to ask sooner or later. There are facts enough in human life to justify a belief that well-doing brings prosperity in its train, and that evil-doing will ere long lead to misery, as a rule more or less fully observed in human affairs. There are periods in a man's life, in a nation's history, when there is no particular need to question the statement. But periods come in

both when facts appear not simply not to accord with, but to give the direct lie to this convenient theory, and such a period—in personal or in national life, perhaps both—gave rise to the Book of Job. The traditional opinion is represented at length, very fully and on the whole very fairly, by the three friends. The righteous man may laugh at death and destruction, says Eliphaz. If thou wert pure and upright, God would make thy habitation prosperous, says Bildad. If thou set thine heart aright and put iniquity far from thee, thou shalt forget thy misery and remember it as waters that are passed away, echoes Zophar. And Job's constant reply, uttered in every conceivable tone, but always the same, is—*That is not true.* What is more, the author of the book says the same. The facts are, that Job is righteous, virtually spotless, God Himself being witness, and that he is called upon to bear overwhelming calamities and unprecedented sufferings. So far as the controversy is concerned, Job is pronounced right and the friends wrong. Whatever the teaching of the book is or is not, it goes directly in the teeth of the current maxims that righteousness and prosperity, wickedness and suffering, are found in corresponding proportions in human life. No repetition of conventional platitudes will meet the heartrending questions raised by the condition

of Job under a righteous Ruler of the world. The book raises these questions in their most aggravated form, and is so far not the book of the dogmatist but of the sceptic, not of the teacher but the doubter.

And surely it is no small matter that the Bible should thus reflect men's doubts. If it is to be a universal book, it must deal frankly with doubt as well as with sin. Both are forms of temptation or trial. Man is being tested intellectually as well as morally, and it is one of the glories of the Bible that it meets the needs of humanity all along the line. There is bolder questioning, a more audacious arraignment of God's righteousness in Job than in Byron; the "everlasting No" is as fully faced in it as in Carlyle. This book is not, it is true, quite alone in Scripture in this respect. Abraham ventures to plead very boldly with the Most High, as if he understood the nature of mercy better than the All-Compassionate. Moses is represented as remonstrating with his God; the psalmists often cry aloud and spare not; while Jeremiah waxes very bold—a hasty reader might say blasphemous — as he reproaches God with failure to fulfil His promises, and cries in his despair, "Wilt Thou indeed be unto me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail?" But nowhere is the word of doubt and denial so

fully and so uncompromisingly portrayed as in Job. This is so marked, that some modern sceptics have represented the book as out of harmony with the general tenor of the Old Testament, and some modern critics have applied to it their favourite method of analysis, and come to the sapient conclusion that the bold statement of the problem came from one hand, and what they deem the orthodox attempts to cover it over or evade it, from other and later pens! But the book (with the possible exception, as we have said, of the Elihu section) stands as one great whole, intelligible, in spite of its complexity, only as a whole, and all attempts to dismember it stand self-condemned. That it gives not a simple, but a manifold answer to a question which is not really simple manifold, but is only a proof of its greatness. Let us see what the answer is.

Job's doubts exhibit themselves by stages. (1) In the first instance he has none. His attitude under his several crushing calamities was like the whole of his early course, "perfect," exhibiting a marvellous degree of submission to God's providence. He "sinned not, nor charged God with foolishness." Having received much good at the hands of God, he was content to receive evil: though it is to be observed that his resignation, as expressed in ch. ii. 10, is not quite as complete as

that in ch. i. 20–22. During many days and nights after this he was silent, his silence expressing a negative but real submission even in the extremity of his grief. (2) Even when he opened his mouth with the bitter cry of ch. iii., he expressed no religious doubt or denial. He "cursed his day," not God. The third chapter is one long moan. It is a very terrible cry of human despair, but it is not so far a complaint, still less an indictment of Divine justice. (3) This feature of Job's utterances appears only after Eliphaz has applied to his smarting sores the sharp blister of an insinuation that his calamities spring from unfaithfulness to God. This is too much for him. He begins to admit more distinctly that his sufferings are from God (vi. 4), and yet he knows that he has "not denied the words of the Holy One" (vi. 10). After this he allows all the bitterness of his soul to stream forth. Sometimes he scornfully repudiates the milder insinuations or downright reproaches of his friends. Sometimes he appeals indignantly to God, who knows his uprightness of heart and integrity of life. Sometimes he remonstrates with the Most High, or complains that direct remonstrance is impossible, for if he "knew where he might find Him, he would fill his mouth with arguments." (4) At a later stage he replies more calmly, so far as the friends are concerned.

His confidence that there is a Supreme Tribunal before which even this high cause may be argued, grows and deepens. He casts about for some as yet unrevealed solution, and at the end of ch. xix. appears disposed to rest in a sublime, unquenchable hope. (5) Yet again, this fails him. In the course of ch. xxviii. he appears to be saying to himself—for the friends are beyond the reach of argument—that wisdom in these matters is for God alone, man's wisdom being to give himself to the duties of practical religion, since these alone are within his reach. The long monologue with which Job closes exhibits him in a comparatively calm but altogether unsatisfied state of mind, for not in pensive reminiscences, or in a reassertion of his righteousness, or in a vain cry "Oh that I had one to hear me!" is peace to be found. But before we come to the statement that "the words of Job are ended," almost every mood of doubt and appeal and denial has been passed through, and has been so fully represented that we may say each has received sympathetic recognition in this remarkable book. And that that should be so is the first proof—no small one—of the value of the Book of Job in our sacred literature.

But of course there is much more than this. It is so easy to ask questions; and though it is something to find a religion in which questioning

is not at once banned as evil and blasphemous, yet it is the work of religion not to raise difficulties but to remove them. What solution does the book furnish of its great perennial problem?

The prologue sheds on the poem the light of another world. The truly religious character of the work is shown by the close connexion here exhibited between the drama of earth and the purposes of heaven. The explanation of man's conflicts, his upward strivings, his downward temptations, is not to be found wholly in himself; neither their origin nor their end are to be found in the sphere of the visible. The prologue introduces us to other orders of being. "Sons of God" are met in the council-chamber of the Great King, and among them appears, not the Prince of Evil, Lucifer the arch-rebel, or Mephistopheles the subtle tempter, but Satan the great Adversary, whose business it is to search and examine into the state of the world of men, solely with the ignoble object of spying out, dwelling upon, and magnifying the evil that is to be found there. Job has thus far baffled his scrutiny; he has detected no flaw, can make no charge. He proposes, therefore, a number of tests, more and more searching and severe, to prove that Job's virtue is but skin-deep, that it will disappear with the prosperity which is at the same time its motive

and its result. "Touch all that he hath"; "touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce Thee to Thy face." The tests are applied: the furnace is made seven times hotter than it is wont to be heated, the flame burns sharply and scorches to the very quick, but Job's faith does not yield. His integrity is proof against Satan's most fiery temptations, and he who submissively says, "Jehovah gave, Jehovah hath taken away, blessed be the name of Jehovah," has proved the triumph of truth and faithfulness in the long-enduring human battle over the worst that the powers of evil can do to shake its allegiance to goodness and to God.

If this were all the teaching of the book, its value in practice would be immense. Grant its premisses, and we find asserted the absolute supremacy of God in the moral world. He sits on the throne. Angels may surround him, men pursue their chequered and troubled life below, the dark figure of the Adversary flit hither and thither, detecting, exposing and gloating over the evil that is only too manifest, and seeking everywhere to undermine and destroy the good. But he can only do that which is permitted him. "Beyond his chain he cannot go." The Almighty must put forth His hand before Satan is allowed to put forth his. In each case there is a limit.

"Touch his property, but not himself." "Touch his flesh, but not his life." And if Job's outcries had been ever so much louder than they were, his moans even more piercing, his doubts and bewilderment under such an inexplicable desertion on the part of the God whom he honoured even more wild and despairing, yet, so long as he held fast his integrity, the victory of goodness would have been assured. Disinterested goodness is proved not to be a dream, but a blessed reality. The servant of God who, when tried to the utmost, may indeed cry bitterly, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" but who to the end is

> strong in will,
> To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield,

is himself a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men. And if there were no other explanation of his woes than this, that he is set to prove that great thesis, and that in the strength which the fear and love of God gives, it is his to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand, it would afford light from heaven which would illumine the darkest spots and hottest conflicts of that unceasing battle in which the sons of men are ever being fiercely tried. Goodness is not an attempt to secure the maximum of comfort with the minimum of effort. It cannot

be translated into terms of oxen and sheep and camels, or happy sons and daughters, or the health and life of the body itself. It has another source, another end, another meaning: "From heaven it came, to heaven returneth"; and the man who can prove that fundamental truth of human life to wife and friends and foes, to men and devils, has not lived in vain, though he has groaned out his soul on an ash-heap, instead of living like a prince in his halls.

But this is not by any means the sole teaching of Job. It is but the beginning of the book. Satan does not reappear — that is significant. But man is not set to live and die in order to prove a point against the mocking spirit of evil, the Mephistopheles *der ewig neint*. The action of the book, such as there is, has not begun. The human side of this great argument has not yet appeared. And the first light that is cast upon it is negative in character; since, as was said, this book gives the lie direct to the philosophy of the friends as an adequate explanation of life. They were not altogether wrong. They misunderstood and ultimately misrepresented Job, in the way that men—friends as well as foes—are perpetually misunderstanding one another. But Eliphaz was neither fool nor hypocrite. From his speeches and those of Bildad and Zophar many a text has been taken by Christian teachers,

and on them Christian discourses have been delivered. With a certain latitude of interpretation, many of the maxims uttered by the friends were sound enough, and in many cases no advice could be more excellent than theirs—"Acquaint now thyself with God and be at peace." But these maxims cannot be stretched to cover the whole of life. What the Book of Job set out to teach, and does teach in tones of thunder, is that the attempt to equate righteousness and prosperity, wickedness and suffering, in this world, is futile. Whichever is the way out of Job's perplexities, *that* is not the right one. Cut-and-dried theories are broken like egg-shells against the hard rock of facts. Argue as you will, the thing is not so, cries the outraged Job, repeating in every conceivable tone of voice the one fact which was preternaturally clear to himself. And the Almighty justifies him. Not justifies all his words, or all his thoughts; for Job too has his lessons to learn. But his position in the controversy is abundantly vindicated. "Ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job hath." They had been undertaking throughout — excellent, pious blunderers — to justify God and condemn Job. Now God Himself justifies Job and condemns them. It is dangerous to stand up as God's representatives if we do not know God's mind.

Is nothing more to be gained from the colloquies than this? After careful consideration, we think not. It is quite true that Job does from time to time appear to be groping his way towards the light of great spiritual truths which would relieve his difficulty. In the severe friction of his spirit sparks are struck out, he hardly knows how. But they are only sparks. Their light is doubtful, feeble, momentary. Job's hold of God is alternately loosened and tightened; and when by faith he grasps firmly the truth that in spite of appearances God is his and on his side, then light dawns, and once or twice day seems very near. But the light is neither clear nor dark. We can only refer to one example, the celebrated passage in ch. xix. 25–27. When we have struggled through the obscurities and ambiguities which make the verses so difficult to translate, that sublime apostrophe hardly implies more than this: Justice will be done somehow, somewhen, somewhere; and—here appears the sublime reach of faith which exceeds and anticipates revelation—I am convinced that I shall see it—

> I know that my Vindicator liveth,
> And He shall stand at last over this dust:
> And after my body hath been thus destroyed,
> Yet from my flesh shall I see God:
> Whom I shall see on my side,
> And mine own eyes shall behold Him, not another's,
> —For *that*, my heart is sick within me.

A noble monument of faith, words worthy to b graven, as they are, with an iron pen in the roc for ever! But they do not contain a solution c the problem. They are an expression of indomi table faith, of inextinguishable hope. They have animated many a weary and despairing heart, and, uttered as they were in the twilight of revelation, they put to shame the feeble confidence of many Christians who falter and fail in the very presence of Him who reassures them with the Saviour's words, "If it were not so, I would have told you." But all the expressions of Job's faith, of which the one just quoted is the loftiest, do not shed direct light upon the grievous problem which exercised him and which exercises us. "He trusted in God that He would deliver him," so runs the cruel and unanswerable taunt: "let Him deliver him, seeing He delighteth in him."

If the speeches of Elihu are considered to form part of the original poem, they contribute a little, though it is but a little, to the solution. He rebukes, with not a little vain confidence, in spite of his assumed modesty, both the friends and Job. The friends had not convinced Job, nor gone the right way to convince him, yet Job was far more wrong than they in Elihu's opinion. He had not taken his troubles as chastisement. He had failed to recognise the educative influence of suffering.

f instead of a scornful and rebellious spirit, Job had humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, he should have been exalted in due time. We may not understand the Almighty's ways, but may, and should always, bow beneath His rod. Now, if these chapters had formed part of the original poem, it is strange that in the sentence pronounced by the Almighty no notice whatever should have been taken of the utterances of one who is brought so prominently forward. The opening words of ch. xxxviii. refer to Job, not to Elihu, yet he is represented as coming in as a kind of self-appointed judge, to resolve the knot which neither Job nor his friends could untie. He does so, further, in a way which partly anticipates and partly mars the solution given in the speeches of the Almighty, which convey undoubtedly the chief lesson of the book. Standing, however, as ch. xxxii.–xxxvii. now do in the midst of the Book of Job, we may certainly learn something from them. They represent one point of view from which this many-sided subject may be considered. They contain truth—truth which did not touch the quick of the contention between Job and his friends, but which must always be remembered as an element in human history. "Παθήματα μαθήματα," says the Greek proverb; "tribulation worketh experience," says St.

Paul. One use of pain in this life, at all events, is to discipline the unchastened spirit; and though Elihu possesses only the germ of this doctrine, does not enunciate it very clearly, and too much "assumes the god" in his deliverances, which after all do not really touch the heart of Job's difficulty, yet his words may take their place in the poem, as we admit in a building an architectural addition which is not wholly useless, though it is not in full keeping with the original design.

Obviously it is when Jehovah appears, that the writer intends his own climax to be reached. When God speaks, let all the earth keep silence. A theophany puts an end to all doubt. Yet few readers of Job but must have been disappointed by the chapters which contain the words of God. Is that all? they not unnaturally cry. How do all these long descriptions of clouds and stars, of horse and eagle, of hippopotamus and crocodile, bear upon the agony of spirit of the man, the worst of whose sufferings was that God seemed to him to be unjust? Is not the writer of the Book of Job, after all, just like the rest of us; he can raise the troubled ghosts, but cannot lay them, and state problems which he is powerless to solve? It seems so, and the author of the book would probably admit that he did not undertake to give the

kind of solution which many of his readers have expected. Yet an answer he does give, and a wonderful one, considering the conditions under which the question was put.

Be it borne in mind that no solution drawn from a life to come was open to him. Job might wonder, or hope, or dream, but he could not *say*, "The balance will be redressed in a future world." Solve this age-long problem with the light of the present life only to guide you, and what courses are open? One is suggested in the prologue. God permits the grievous afflictions which often try His people for higher ends, that they may not learn to serve Him for what they can get, and that it should not be said their virtue is of a utilitarian or selfish character. The drama of Job is being played on the theatre of the universe, with sons of God and Satan for spectators, and the issues of it concern—if we may say so—the honour of Almighty God. *But Job must not know that.* Even when God speaks, He will not declare that which must remain behind the veil, else the very meaning of the trial would be gone. The question is, Can man hold on and hold out in God's service without that veil being lifted? The answer is to be Yes; therefore God does not lift the veil to the end, and in the words which He does speak we miss an element which those who

are anxious fully to justify the ways of God e. men look for in vain.

The conditions, therefore, under which light i' to be given to Job are limited indeed. But, firs of all, God does speak to Job, and does not con demn him as the friends have done. That is more than half the battle. Job has believed in God (so to say) against God. He has believed in the God in whom he trusted, as against what appeared to be a Divine judgment of an unjust character. He desired, as every righteous man desires, to come face to face with the truth. He desired the Ultimate Arbiter to speak: when He speaks, all will be well. He spoke, and all was well. He did not smite Job with a thunderbolt for blasphemy, He did not blast him with judgment as an evil-doer. He did not for the moment directly justify Job, because Job had been in error, and had his own lessons to learn. But what mattered that? Job was not really blasphemous or rebellious. He was prepared to learn any lesson God would teach him, however severe; and the lesson, when it came, though grave, was not severe. Job desired that God should speak, and then he was ready to listen and learn. He did listen and learn. God spoke out of the whirlwind and the fire, but it was a still, small voice when it came. Job recognised this, and in the first instance

xli. 2–5) showed himself humbled, and in the second (xlii. 5, 6) showed himself contrite. Hitherto he had known God, but from afar; now he saw Him face to face. "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

What was it which produced such an impression upon the mind of the patriarch? The glories of creation and the wonders of the universe were not new to him. Eliphaz and the others had spoken of them, Job himself had described them. But it is another thing for God Himself to appear in and through them. Nature does but sit at "Time's whirring loom and weave for God the mantle thou seest Him by." It is one thing to see the mantle, and quite another to see His face. And when He looks out from behind that living robe, His servant who had just been complaining of His absence, His forgetfulness, His apathy, may well be awed into trembling silence.

> He stood there. Like the smoke
> Pillared o'er Sodom when day broke,
> I saw Him. . . . Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
> Who fell before His feet, a mass,
> No man now.

To Job no form appeared, but he heard a Voice. The Voice said, "What is man in the presence of God? He who created, He who sustains the marvellous, inexplicable, infinitely complex life of

the world around, created and sustains thee. What power hast thou to originate life, to maintain it, even to understand what thou seest of it?" The conclusion to be drawn from the overwhelming questions propounded in the Almighty's address is not given in words; there is but one answer to them, and one lesson to be learned from them: "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Shall He not care for that life which is more than meat, that moral Order which is more than life itself? Job, like Jonah, was angry, but he did not well to be angry. Jonah thought that he understood the ethics of the question of Nineveh better than the All-Wise, who holds in the hollow of His hand more than one city with its "six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle." Job was not merely silenced, he was softened. Not, as Dr. Mozley expressed it, because "amazing power softens him, and he feels himself within its grasp a poor and feeble creature, to be dealt with just as that Power pleases,"[1] but because the vision of One who displays such wisdom and mastery where he is impotent and unintelligent leaves him un-

[1] *Essays*, vol. ii. p. 219.

speakably humble, unspeakably safe, as regards his moral as well as his physical life, in the hands of One whom he had long trusted, and whom he ought not for a single moment to have doubted.

There is in the address of the Almighty no fresh light cast upon the problem of the suffering of the righteous itself. The arguments—if they may be called such—which it contains, are unavailing as against an unbeliever. The argument from the analogy of nature is open at once to the objection that there is no solution of moral perplexities in the processes of inanimate or animate nature around us. But the argument is a spiritual one, and is cogent to a spiritual mind. When the spiritual eye, prepared to see God, discerns not "processes of nature" but *Himself* in creation, then the man who believes in a living God is ready to leave himself, body, soul, and spirit, his moral character, his bodily health, his worldly circumstances, all he has and is, safe in God's hands. If even for a moment he has doubted or denied God, he is sorry, and is prepared to "repent in dust and ashes."

After this, the epilogue may appear to present an anti-climax. It may seem a descent from a lofty spiritual height to a very mundane level, to read after this of Job's having twice as much as he had before, all his relatives and friends gathering

about him, that "every man also gave him a piece of money, and every one a ring of gold." If Job really thought that this was the deepest solution of the problem, he had been taught his lesson in vain. But the explanation is very simple. Under the conditions of the time this was the only way in which to indicate Job's complete justification. The writer could not say, "And Job died, and he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom." The epilogue does but fulfil the conditions of what we call "poetic justice," and reinstates Job in the position of which he had been deprived for high ends which were beyond his ken. Job's subsequent prosperity is the translation into the concrete of the Divine judgment that "the Lord accepted Job." Perhaps, too, as has been suggested, Job was now able for the first time to use material prosperity, enjoyment, comfort, and "happiness" in the only way in which they are really healthy for man. "As long as they are sought or prized as things essential, so far they have a tendency to disennoble our nature, and are a sign that we are still in servitude to selfishness. Only when they lie outside us, as ornaments merely to be worn or laid aside as God pleases—only then may such things be possessed with impunity. Job's heart in early times had clung to them more than he

knew, but now he was purged clean, and they were restored because he had ceased to need them." [1]

Or perhaps it is more likely that this is to introduce a lesson for which the times were not fully ripe. For it is not wise to try to read into Job more than the book really contains. It is wonderfully rich and full of suggestion, but it does not completely solve the mystery of pain. That was at the time impossible. God, man, sin, salvation, immortality—on all these great themes much light remained to be shed by subsequent revelations, and the hoary patriarch had much to learn from a Christian child. To begin with, the description of Job's character is comparative only. The holiest man knows that he is not "perfect," and that he needs forgiveness, cleansing, the discipline of sorrow, and the purification of the inmost heart, as Job did not and could not. The mode in which the salvation of men is to be wrought out could not be fully understood in the times when "gifts and sacrifices were offered, which could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience." The meaning of "chastening" was then but partly understood, and the revelation of the "eternal weight of glory" wrought out by the "light

[1] Froude, *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, vol. i. p. 321.

affliction which is but for a moment," had yet to be made.

But the Book of Job has its place in the Canon of Scripture, and that a high one. Like other Old Testament books, it is preparatory, but not on that account now obsolete. The author of the Book of Job was feeling his way towards a higher truth. It is in the heart of the world's darkest enigmas that we find glimpses of the highest spiritual truths, just as the astronomer pays most attention to the difficulties and anomalies in his mathematical calculations, and by means of them is guided to the discovery of a new planet. The apparent injustice of this world's order is just such an enigma. In it are buried the clues to more than even Christians can at present understand. Job had not, it is true, unravelled the knot so far as the author of the Second Isaiah. The mystic secret wrapped up in the words, "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted," was hidden from his eyes. But he was trembling upon its verge. A Moses could be found to say, "Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of the book which Thou hast written": and a Paul, "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to

the flesh." Even a wild, semi-heathenish Danton could leave this word upon record, "*Que mon nom soit flêtri, pourvu que la France soit libre!*" "Let my name be accursed, so that France be but free!" And Job was feeling his way towards a higher truth than that he who served God should have sons and daughters, sheep and oxen, camels and asses, and nothing to disturb him. It was a hard battle, for he had little light to guide him. But so far as he was an undeserving sufferer, he foreshadowed the Sufferer upon Calvary. "All cases of innocent suffering that are, or have been, or will be, are in a sense the shadows and reflections of our Lord's, the true pattern and exemplar of such suffering; and the afflictions of Job and the elder saints were shadows of it beforehand. . . . In Him the world's ostracism was completed, and Supreme and Divine goodness encountered a perfect and consummate injustice. . . . All other ill returns which have been made to good men, parents, friends, deliverers, in this wild, irregular scene, are but faint types and reflections of this great one; and the Crucifixion is the one consummate act of injustice to which all others are but distant approaches."[1]

But the great difference between the sufferings of Job and the sufferings of good men to-day,

[1] Mozley, *Essays*, vol. ii. pp. 228, 229.

between the shadows beforehand of that One Sufferer and the shadows and reflections afterwards, is this: Those who can look upon the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ with instructed eyes can see the meaning of the long history of human woe as it could not be seen before. They can understand the meaning of Redemption, and the way in which it has pleased God to accomplish it for man. They see not only the suffering which sin brings upon the evil-doer, but the suffering sin inevitably brings upon others, and the suffering by which alone the victory over it is to be gained. They can see in Christ God Himself doing battle with this great foe, His hatred of the sin, His compassion for the sinner, and the Captain of man's salvation made perfect, as such, through sufferings. They can hear the taunt levelled at the Crucified One, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," and know it true in a sense that was not intended by the speakers, for because He would save others, therefore Himself He could not, and would not, seek to save. That work of redemption has been wrought out once for all. Yet in a measure it holds that all who would be Christ's must learn this Divine secret of His, and "fill up on their part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ, for His body's sake, which is the Church." It is for

the Job of to-day to suffer gladly, as the Job of primitive times was unable to do. Every sufferer for righteousness' sake may, in the Master's words, "rejoice and be exceeding glad"; may, in the words of His faithful follower who at one time rebelled so fiercely at the notion of the Suffering Righteous One, "rejoice inasmuch as he is partaker of Christ's sufferings." He upon whom rests the "Spirit of glory and of God" cannot be crushed under any load of pain.

But we have left our proper theme. The Book of Job is best studied quite apart from the New Testament; then the truths more or less clearly taught in it may be brought into the light of the glory that excelleth. Our too hasty survey, however, of this first specimen of Wisdom-Literature has surely left us with a high appreciation of its general character. Whatever be the case with any other part, this "book of wisdom" is profoundly spiritual. No man can say that in Job we find the mere repeater of wise saws and modern instances, preaching down all high enthusiasm, and insisting upon the importance of conventional maxims. It is one long protest against mere conventionalism. But it is so in virtue of a higher wisdom. It is not, as some have hinted, sceptical at heart, and opposed to the orthodox religious teaching of Judaism. It is not true, as

some have said, that so far from being patient, Job is really an example of splendid impatience. That is true of some chapters, but the impatience is splendid just because it is an episode in a history of patience, and shows how grand and strong a thing true patience is. Job failed for the time, just as Moses did, and Peter, where he was strongest. He "fought his doubts and gathered strength," and his very doubts were but the other side of his faith. It is easy for a man who is not jealous for God to be what he calls patient, which means shallow and easy-going. He who is compelled by his own or others' woes to face the riddle of this difficult life may well be impatient for a time, impatient of that which hinders patience from having her perfect work. Wisdom is justified of all her children, and not least by those who, perplexed by some of her paradoxes and half-maddened by some of her riddles, have faithfully followed her steps and steadily clung to her side, till despair has changed into a Divine content, and the patience of hope has braced and disciplined their souls to await the victory which Divine Wisdom will secure for her children at the last.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: ITS STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS.

THE Book of Proverbs is essentially *the* book of Hebrew Wisdom. It better deserves the name than the apocryphal "Wisdom of Solomon," remarkable in its own way as that book undoubtedly is. The early Fathers of the Church, Clement of Rome, Hegesippus, Irenæus, Gregory Nazianzen, and others, style it, "the wise book," "the book of wisdom," "all-excellent wisdom," or "wisdom, mother of all the virtues." It remains the central and most representative monument of what the Jews understood by *Chokmah*, and in it the word and all that it implies is best studied.

The composite structure of the book appears upon the surface. It bears in the first line the name of Solomon, but a comparatively slight examination is sufficient to set on one side the view advocated by Keil and others, that almost the entire book came direct from Solomon's own

pen. The first nine chapters have a character of their own, a unity of style and scope, which distinguishes them at once from those which follow. At the beginning of the 10th chapter we find the title "Proverbs of Solomon," and the collection thus inscribed apparently ends with ch. xxii. 16. At ch. xxii. 17 we read, "Incline thine ear and hear the words of the wise"; and at ch. xxiv. 23, "These also are sayings of the wise"; the two sections thus headed apparently presenting us with two appendices to the first "Solomonic" collection. At ch. xxv. 1 we read, "These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out"; and ch. xxv.–xxix. form the second main collection of the book. To this again are added three brief appendices, "The words of Agur, son of Jakeh" (ch. xxx.), "The words of King Lemuel" (xxxi. 1–9), and an acrostic poem, without name or title, being a kind of ode in praise of the Virtuous Woman (xxxi. 10–31).

Three sections, then, of the book bear the name of Solomon, but in such a way as to make it almost certain that it was not used by the royal author of himself. In each case the title of the document which follows is written by someone of later date, who inscribes the composition with the name of the king who was pre-eminent

throughout Israelitish history for wisdom. Did those who penned these titles mean to imply that Solomon himself composed all that follows? This is not necessarily implied by the form of speech, and some examination is needed before we can decide what relation Solomon bore to these several compositions or compilations. In the first place, quite apart from this book, we know that an early tradition preserved the record of Solomon's exceptional wisdom, and it is said that he "spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five" (1 Kings iv. 32). The character of his wisdom was partly practical, as illustrated in 1 Kings iii.; partly what we should call philosophical, as when it is said that he was "wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda"; partly it lay in the region of natural history (1 Kings iv. 33); and partly it was exhibited in the power to solve "riddles" or "hard questions," exercises in those subtle apologues or analogies between the natural and spiritual worlds, which have always been the special delight of the Oriental (1 Kings x. 1). Turning to the two main collections of gnomic sayings (x.–xxii. 16, and xxv.–xxix.), we find that we certainly have not before us such a collection as is referred to in 1 Kings. There are no "songs" in these chapters, and nowhere near

three thousand proverbs. But these chapters do contain a somewhat miscellaneous assortment of pithy sayings, a large number of which may very well have been uttered by Solomon himself, and many of which must date from at least the early period of the Israélitish monarchy. It is the most probable supposition, and there is no difficulty in the way of its adoption, that a considerable proportion of these *M'shalim* are characteristic specimens of those sayings of Solomon which more than anything else preserved his reputation for wisdom generation after generation.

May we, however, go further than this, and take it for granted that the whole of either or both these collections is purely Solomonic? And first of ch. x. 1–xxii. 16. An examination of this section shows that it is not arranged on any clear or well-defined plan, though it would not be right to regard it as a mere promiscuous gathering of proverbs, thrown together almost at random. Sayings which refer to the same subject are frequently (not always) placed together, and a close examination makes it probable that of these one is earlier, another later, in date. Repetitions are frequent. Sometimes the proverb as a whole recurs; *e.g.*, ch. xiv. 12 is identical with ch. xvi. 25—

> There is a way that is straight before a man,
> But the end thereof are the ways of death.

Sometimes the first member is the same, while the second is slightly changed; *e.g.*, "A wise son maketh a glad father" may be followed by "A foolish son is the heaviness of his mother" (x. 1), or by "A foolish man despiseth his mother" (xv. 20). In ch. x. 6, 11, we have an example of two proverbs placed near together, in which the second member is the same—"Violence covereth the mouth of the wicked." Examples of this kind might be multiplied, as well as of proverbs placed near together, almost identical in phraseology, but with some slight variation, giving a different turn to the moral lesson taught. Compare, for example, ch. x. 2, "Treasures of wickedness bring no profit," with ch. xi. 4, "Possessions are of no profit in the day of wrath," the second clause in each case being "Righteousness delivers from death." Again, we read in ch. xiii. 14—

> The doctrine of the wise is a fountain of life,
> To escape the snares of death.

The same proverb is repeated in ch. xiv. 27, with the significant variation that "the fear of Jehovah" is spoken of as the source of true life and a means of escaping the snares of evil which inevitably lead to death. Without pursuing this kind of examination in greater detail, it will already be clear that this collection of proverbs does not

read like a carefully prepared selection of the utterances of one man, but a compilation of sayings of various dates, some of them almost certainly derived from or dependent upon the phraseology of others. When we read, for example, in ch. xiv. 31—

> He who oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker,
> But he that hath mercy on the needy honoureth Him,

and in ch. xvii. 5—

> He that mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker,
> And he that is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished,

it seems unlikely on the one hand that the same author composed both and placed them in different parts of the same collection, or, on the other, that the two sayings proceed from different authors, each ignorant of the other's work. The probability is that both sayings were current, the second being moulded upon the first, presenting its main truth in a sterner and more pronounced form.

This probability is heightened when we pass to the second collection, ch. xxv.–xxix. Here the title distinctly tells us that certain "men of Hezekiah" either "collected" or "transferred" the proverbs which follow. This may mean that they gathered them from oral tradition and transferred them to writing; or that they transferred

them from one or more existing documents to the pages of their own collection. In either case it seems to point to a work of tradition in relation to proverbs which would account for the phenomena above noted, as well as the fact that many of the sayings are not likely to have come from a king, and other features which require explanation. If Solomon were the earliest and the chief author of these Mashalic sayings, a number of his most celebrated utterances having been handed down, while many perished; and if upon these as a model many wise men framed proverbs of their own, sometimes keeping close to the earlier phraseology, sometimes departing from it, but in such a way as to show that the earlier form was known to them, such a hypothesis would go far to explain all the facts of these collections, and be quite consistent with the title adopted. Thus, the compilation of the "proverbs of Solomon" would correspond in more ways than one with the compilation of the "psalms of David." In the second collection there are found a large number of proverbs repeated from the first collection, either in whole or in part. This makes it probable that the two collections were not made by the same persons, a supposition which is borne out by the different scope of the second collection. The former is

more personal, the latter more national; the former may be considered as a "book for youth," the latter as a "people's book." The opening sentences of ch. xxv. refer entirely to the dignity and excellence of kings and the duty of those who move in kings' courts. Not all who are familiar with our Lord's parable concerning the chief seats at wedding feasts (Luke xiv. 7–11) have caught His allusion to Prov. xxv. 6, 7, or marked the significant variations by means of which the Master of parables has stamped this one as His own.

An examination of the sections described as "words of the wise" confirms the view thus taken of the compilation of the longer sections. There are points of contact as well as points of difference between the smaller and larger collections, and all point in the direction of a slowly and steadily accumulated wealth of proverbial wisdom, on which some master-mind like that of Solomon had set its mark at an early date, but towards which many minds had contributed in the course of generations, all being animated, however, by one dominant spirit of practical godliness which gives, in the midst of variety, a remarkable unity to the whole. It is possible, of course, that Solomon himself composed every proverb in the collections called by his name;

that at different periods in his life he struck out similar but slightly differing coins from the same mint of wisdom. But the more carefully the proverbs are examined in detail, the less likely does such a conclusion appear. The current definition of a proverb marks it out as the embodiment of "one man's wit and many men's wisdom," and in all probability this collection of sacred proverbs contains at the same time the record of a nation's wisdom and the impress of the mind of one inspired man. He must have been a man of great practical sagacity and great power of condensed and telling expression, as well as a man of essentially religious spirit; and in his wake there seem to have followed a number of inferior but divinely-guided men who handed on the torch of practical godliness for the benefit of succeeding generations. Such a view of the Book of Proverbs in no way detracts from the true glory of Solomon, while it goes far to account for the form of the compilation that has come down to us.

The opening chapters (i.–ix.) have a somewhat different history. They are distinguished by a more flowing style, and apparently are written by one hand. They are not so much proverbs as proverbial discourses. After an exordium (i. 1–6) in which the nature and object of Proverbial

Wisdom is stated, we find a series of three somewhat long addresses, or fifteen paragraphs, uttered as by a father to his son, or a teacher to his disciple. The subjects of these addresses are various, the first of all being a warning against crimes of violence, while others have reference to sins of uncleanness, or sloth and self-indulgence, and others again dwell on the positive excellence and advantages of Wisdom as guide, protector, and friend. It is impossible, however, even for the English reader to miss observing the unity of style and connexion of thought which makes these chapters one whole. In parts the aphoristic mode of expression is dropped for several verses together, and even where it is preserved there is a connexion between the detached sayings much closer than any to be found in the body of the book. These opening chapters appear to have been prefixed as a suitable introduction to the collections which follow. Taking the date assigned to the second collection as the time of Hezekiah, say, the end of the eighth century B.C., two hundred and fifty years after the death of Solomon, the first collection (x.–xxii.) may well date from fifty to a hundred years earlier. The introductory section, ch. i.–ix., should for several reasons be placed after the second collection. Most critics have noticed the similarity between

the hortatory tone of these opening chapters and that of Deuteronomy. Without entering upon the question of the date of that part of the Pentateuch, we are expressly told that in the time of Josiah it came upon both king and people with all the force of a discovery, and its influence may be distinctly traced in sundry parts of the Old Testament written after that period. The development in the form of the *mashal* also points to a later date for these nine chapters. A similar reason would, moreover, lead us to place them earlier than the Book of Job, which was probably written towards the close of the seventh century B.C. The middle of that century may therefore be assigned with some confidence as the time when the process of collecting previous collections of proverbs was proceeded with and this characteristic introduction written.

It is not so easy to characterise the three appendices to the whole book. The first is entitled "The words of Agur, son of Jakeh, the oracle." Neither of these proper names is found elsewhere, and the word *Massa*, translated "oracle," is usually applied only to prophetic writings. The names Ithiel and Ucal, if understood as proper names ("With-me-is-God" and "Strong-am-I") of supposed disciples, do not help us. Taking the text as it stands, we can

only understand the title as preparing us to listen to the words of an otherwise unknown sage, whose utterance of wisdom is of more than usually poetical and enigmatical character, possessing therefore something of the nature of prophecy. The contents of ch. xxx. do not, however, fully bear out this title. Some eminent critics hold the word Massa to be the name of a country belonging to the descendants of Ishmael (see Gen. xxv. 14), Agur and Lemuel being brothers, sons of "her to whom Massa is obedient," that is, the queen of the country. But this is mere speculation, no kingdom of Massa being otherwise known to us. The name Lemuel, again, has by some been taken to be a name for Solomon, his mother's counsel being given to him when his early devotion to God was about to pass into sensual self-indulgence and excess. Amidst a multitude of conjectures with very little foundation, perhaps on the whole the most probable is that we have in these chapters relics of ethical wisdom such as floated amongst the neighbouring nations that were brought under the influence of Jewish religion, such sporadic inspiration as was found, for example, in the prophecies of Balaam, or as some think, in the Book of Job itself. We know from 2 Chron. xxxii. 23 and other sources, that during the time of Hezekiah considerable influence was

exerted by the kingdom of Judah on the nations around; and the 87th Psalm is an interesting memorial of the hopes entertained at that time that true citizens of Zion would be found amongst men of Philistia and Tyre, of Egypt and Babylon. The style and tone of these chapters is in any case not very lofty or spiritual, though they contain much that is interesting.

The closing section, ch. xxxi. 10–31, is a detached poem of the acrostic order. It is one whole, being a sustained eulogium on a truly virtuous woman, and much of its phraseology has passed into the vocabulary of the world. We cannot definitely fix the date on the ground of the alphabetic arrangement, but probably we shall not be far astray if we place it somewhat before the Exile.

Before leaving the subject of the structure of Proverbs, we may briefly refer to a matter of interest and importance with which it will be impossible to deal at length. The Greek version of the book known as the Septuagint contains very considerable and remarkable deviations from the Hebrew. Some of these are of the nature of glosses, or explanations of obscure passages, others seem to be attempts to complete imperfect sentences, others are emendations, whilst there are to be found in addition interpolations of some length, omissions of many

detached verses, and the transposition of entire passages. So great is the diversity between the Greek and the Hebrew, that it seems tolerably clear that in very early times—say, the second century B.C.—there were two different recensions of the Book of Proverbs, one current in Palestine, the other in Alexandria. For the most part, the Hebrew gives undoubtedly the purer text; but in places the LXX. may be consulted with advantage. Some of the additions, for example, are quite as lofty in conception as the original, and may perhaps be viewed as "fruits grown on the stock of the noble poetry of wisdom among the ancient Hebrews," or perhaps as relics of early Solomonic wisdom which had escaped other collectors. Some of these additions, however, clearly betray a Greek origin, and a few are closely akin to sayings found in Ecclesiasticus. We append a few examples.

At ch. vi. 8, after the well-known exhortation to the sluggard to mend his ways by learning from the ant, the Septuagint inserts the following—

> Or go to the bee, and learn what a worker she is,
> And how noble a work she performeth.
> Her labours kings and private persons use for health,
> And she is desired by all and held in great reputation,
> Although she is weak in point of strength,
> Because she regardeth wisdom, she is advanced to great honour.

In ch. ix. 12 the Greek version runs, "If thou art wise, thou art wise for thyself and thy neighbour; but if thou prove scornful, thou alone shalt drink evil to the dregs." Immediately after this verse, which it will be seen is an attempt to improve upon a simpler original, three verses are inserted, which run thus—

> He that stays himself upon lies attempts to rule the winds,
> And himself shall pursue birds in their flight;
> For he leaves the ways of his own vineyard,
> And strays from the paths of his own farm;
> And goeth through a waterless desert and a land ordained to drought,
> And with his hands he gathereth unfruitfulness.

The sayings of Agur are in the Greek divided into two parts, one of which is inserted after ch. xxiv. 22, and the other after ch. xxiv. 34, together with the words addressed to Lemuel; that is to say, these two appendices are placed with the "words of the wise" appended to the first "Solomonic" collection. These and other kindred facts are interesting chiefly as shedding some light upon the way in which the Book of Proverbs was originally compiled.

Gathering up, therefore, the conclusions thus far reached as to the structure of the whole book, the analysis would read somewhat as follows:—

Section I. Ch. i.–ix. THE PRAISE OF WISDOM. A hortatory introduction to the Proverbs properly so called, written between the time of Josiah and the Exile.

Section II. Ch. x. 1–xxii. 16. FIRST COLLECTION OF THE "PROVERBS OF SOLOMON," containing the chief part of the earlier[1] sayings of Solomon and others that have been preserved. Compiled early in the eighth century B.C.

Section III. Ch. xxii. 17–xxiv. 22. Shorter collection of the "SAYINGS OF THE WISE." Hortatory in character, but miscellaneous in choice of topics.

Section IV. Ch. xxiv. 23–34. APPENDIX, containing a few additional "sayings of the wise."

Section V. Ch. xxv.–xxix. SECOND COLLECTION OF THE "PROVERBS OF SOLOMON," containing some of early date, but for the most part later than Section II., describing often a later condition of society. Compiled at the end of the eighth century.

Section VI. Ch. xxx. The words of Agur, son of Jakéh.

Section VII. Ch. xxxi. 1–9. The words of King Lemuel.

Section VIII. Ch. xxxi. 10–31. Acrostic Poem in praise of the Virtuous Woman.

It may be well before closing this chapter to draw attention to the interior structure of these various sections of the book, pointing out any distinctions observable. The basis of the whole composition, the ultimate atom, so to speak, in the composite structure, is the gnome or maxim, pithily expressed in the form of a distich. This is the *mashal* or proverb, apparently found in its

[1] It may be well to note that Prof. A. B. Davidson and other eminent critics are disposed to consider the proverbs in this section as later than those in Section V.

simplest and original form when the two parallel clauses of which it consists express in the briefest and most pointed way some comparison between the natural and the moral or spiritual world. A specimen of it is found in the proverb which declares how a proverb should not be used—

> The legs of the lame hang loose;
> So is a parable in the mouth of fools.—(xxvi. 7.)

It is true the word *mashal* is used in the Old Testament of many different kinds of composition, from the brief apophthegm of 1 Sam. x. 12, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" or the "Physician, heal thyself," quoted by our Lord, to Jotham's "parable" and the elaborate taunting ode of Isa. xiv. 4–23, "How hath the oppressor ceased!" But the fundamental meaning of the word is resemblance, comparison, and its primary use is to describe the brief maxim which is cast in the form of a similitude or analogy. Frequently there is no connecting link between the two halves of the comparison, or a simple "and" fastens them together, the illustration becoming all the more effective for the simplicity of structure.

> A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass,
> And a rod for the back of fools.

> The door turneth upon its hinges,
> And the sluggard upon his bed.

Iron sharpeneth iron;
And a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

A gold ring in a swine's snout—
A fair woman devoid of discretion.

In the same form is cast that exquisite but often misunderstood comparison, surely much more expressive and beautiful for the absence of all notes of comparison—

Golden apples in silver baskets:
A word spoken in fitting season.

The two parts of the distich are, however, often contrasted—

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing,
But the glory of kings is to search out a matter.

When pride cometh, then cometh shame;
But with the lowly is wisdom.

The distich is sometimes expanded into the tetrastich, of four lines, or into a stanza of six or eight lines. Examples of these may be found in ch. xxiii. 12–14, xxx. 29–31, and the longer passages enable us to see how the *mashal* as proverb developed into the sustained poem. A good illustration of the process of development is found in parts of Prov. i.–ix., and the complete result is seen, as we have already observed, in the Book of Job.

Other words used to describe forms of proverbial sayings are *m'litsah* and *chidah*, "dark saying"

and "riddle" (see Prov. i. 6). Both these words indicate the enigmatical character of some of the proverbs; the former implying an involved, and the latter a knotty saying. The obscurity of these utterances may be due to their taking literally the form of a riddle, or to something not easily intelligible in the subject-matter, as in Ps. xlix. 4 and lxxviii. 2. Examples of the riddle proper are found in the history of Samson, and it is not unlikely that such passages as Prov. xxx. 15, 16, and 18, 19, were originally propounded in the form of riddles; *e.g.*, "What four things are never satisfied?"[1] Even in their present shape some of these proverbs are enigmatical enough. But the "dark sayings" referred to in the introduction, ch. i. 6, do not refer chiefly to such as might require a little ingenuity or insight into the form of a comparison bearing a moral lesson. The reference there seems to be rather to the deeper questions concerning life and its meaning, the right way of ordering conduct, and the practical application of maxims in the department of what may be called moral or religious philosophy, with which the Book of Proverbs is chiefly concerned.

[1] To these numerical proverbs the Rabbis later gave the name *Middah*. A good example is found in ch. vi. 16–19, in the "six things, yea seven, which the Lord hateth."

It will not escape the careful reader that there is often much true poetry condensed into these brief, epigrammatic sayings. Not unfrequently we read of the "low, prosaic level" on which these proverbs run; they are said to be cold and prudential in their views of life, and shallow and commonplace in their form of expression. With their ethical and religious aspects we shall deal shortly; but it would be a mistake to underestimate the Proverbs even considered as poetry. They must not be compared with the Psalms, which contain poetry of a different and undoubtedly a higher order. Pope is a poet as well as Milton, though he works in a different material and by entirely different methods. The gnomic poet condenses into a line what the lyrical or epic poet expands into an elaborate stanza. It is harder to appreciate the beauty of the figure in its condensed form, though its substance is more easily retained in the memory. Many of our Lord's parables have come down to us in an abbreviated form only, and they have on this account received much less attention than those that are fully worked out; indeed, books on the parables usually take no account of them at all. Yet who can doubt that the comparison of the well-trained teacher to the householder bringing forth from his treasure things new and old, the story of the strong man armed guarding his

own court till the stronger than he comes upon him, and other similar *m'shalim* might have been, perhaps were, worked out by the Master, so as to be as impressive as the parable of the Sower or the Labourers in the Vineyard?

Again, these proverbs lose something of their force, at all events for the hasty reader, by being packed closely together in small compass. A number of small pictures crowded together upon the walls of a large gallery are not likely to receive much separate attention from the visitor, especially if he be paying a short visit in a hurry. To do many of these proverbs justice, they should be detached, considered separately, and each of them expanded into the full similitude, which is often hinted at rather than expressed.

> Fresh water to a fainting soul—
> So is good news from a far country."—(xxv. 25.)

It would spoil the miniature to enlarge it upon a more extended canvas, but to understand the beauty of the proverb, we must transport ourselves into an age in which such comparison would not be hackneyed and commonplace as it is with us, and into a state of society in which a man might easily be separated from friends and kindred so as to receive no news of them at all for months or years. Even now it is with a gleam of the eye

which householders with six postal deliveries a day cannot understand, that the Englishman in China reads these very words over the foreign post-office in Hankow. The Christian perhaps thinks of a certain Message of glad tidings from a country man cannot reach by any effort of his own, "good news" fresher and more life-giving even than the drops of water in the desert which save a perishing life, glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all peoples. The wise man has wrapped up a wealth of meaning in his short apophthegm, the significance of which is apt to be lost because it is short and buried in a chapter which contains a score of others like it. If it be said that the comparison in this case is trite and obvious, it will not be difficult to adduce examples embodying more subtle thought and observation.

> The fining-pot for silver, the furnace for gold,
> And a man is tried by his praise.—(xxvii. 21.)

What tests a man more severely and searchingly than praise, which is at the same time so dear and so trying to us all? A commonplace philosopher might have pointed out that a man is tried by abuse or slander or persecution; but knowledge of the human heart shows that nothing so proves a man as the way in which he receives and treats praise bestowed upon him. The north wind

makes him fasten his cloak more tightly about him, but the sunshine makes him discard his wrappings and show himself as he is. If the verse means, as some think, that a man should try the praise bestowed upon him as in a furnace and purify it from all alloy of flattery and falsehood, a similar meaning is less suitable and impressively suggested.

> As water showeth face to face,
> So the heart showeth man to man.—(xxvii. 19.)

Or, as it has been paraphrased, "The face finds in water its reflection, and the heart of man finds in man its echo." Heart possesses the power of reflecting and echoing the feelings of heart, and so men are bound together in bonds of natural sympathy, which they cannot disown without disowning their share in a common nature. Mutual understanding, mutual adaptation, mutual sympathy founded on mutual relationship, lie at the very root and spring of the nature God has given us. For, as St. Paul said at Athens, "He made *of one* every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." Everywhere and always, unless man's violence has strained or snapped the chord which God has implanted in the breast, soul speaks to soul, and heart responds to heart, with a music which the human heart only can understand.

These are but a few examples which might easily be multiplied. But, truth to tell, it is an exceedingly difficult task to comment on these brief words of Wisdom and expand their teaching without weakening their force and marring their beauty. The commentator must be content to bear the reproach of offering his readers "Scripture and water," if he can thereby induce them to study more closely the ample treasures in a little room provided for all who will take the trouble to examine and think out the full meaning of the "Proverbs of Solomon."

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: ITS RELIGIOUS TEACHING.

IN the Book of Ecclesiasticus there is found a splendid eulogium of Wisdom. Amongst the blessed she is pronounced eminently blessed. She is represented as dwelling in the waves of the sea and in all the earth and in every people and nation, and in all these she sought for a resting-place, asking where she should take up her abode and find her inheritance. "So the Creator of all things gave me a commandment, and He that made me caused my tabernacle to rest, and said, Let thy dwelling be in Jacob, and thine inheritance in Israel. In the holy tabernacle I served before Him, and so was I established in Zion. Likewise in the beloved city He gave me rest, and in Jerusalem was my power."[1] If we hold these words to be true—and history has confirmed and illustrated them—in what sense can it be said that Wisdom pre-eminently took up her

[1] Ecclus. xxiv. 7–11.

abode in Israel? Athens has been the home of philosophy, Rome the fountain of law, Florence the mistress of art, and in these later days science finds her abode chiefly among the nations of Western Europe. But Jerusalem? The Jews were a nation few in numbers, obscure in origin, narrow in prejudices, and exclusive in their ideas; in what sense can it be said that Wisdom found a special home among them? Only in so far as the Divine origin of all true wisdom is recognised, only in so far as philosophy is considered to be the handmaid of religion.

It has often been said that the Book of Proverbs is not truly religious, that it moves upon a lower plane, contemplates lower aims, than the other books of the Old Testament. Its sphere is safe to be ethics, and ethics for the most part of a utilitarian and even sordid kind. Many of these wise saws, we are told, would receive no respect at all were they not found within the covers of the Bible. There is a measure of truth in these statements, but enough error to make them quite misleading. If we take the Book of Proverbs as a whole,—and as the book has come down to us as a whole, it is best and fairest so to take it, even though we may be sure it was gradually compiled,—then the fundamental character of the teaching of Proverbs is not

recognised in the above objections. Even if we consider the parts separately, it may be shown that in each there is salt enough of a higher kind to preserve the Proverbs from sinking to the level of a merely prudential morality. There is good reason, moreover, for the very frequent reference to the earthly rewards of virtue which the Proverbs contain. A religious man who has no clear revelation of a future life is bound by his very faith in God and in providence to cling to a belief in earthly rewards and punishments, and there is sufficient evidence in the constitution of the present life to warrant a belief in a Moral Governor of the world, even though it be impossible to verify all the maxims of the Proverbs in the directness and absoluteness of their statements as to the reward of virtue in this world. As we shall show, however, there is, by the side of the prevailing "prudential" or "utilitarian" strain of the Proverbs, a strain of spiritual teaching distinctly present, which has hardly received the attention it deserves.

The point of view from which the book is written could not be better stated than in its opening words, which face the reader immediately after the brief introduction contained in the first six verses—

> The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of knowledge;
> The foolish despise wisdom and instruction.—(i. 7.)

This is a motto placed before the first address to the disciple, containing the key to all that follows. It occurs again in similar words towards the end of the section in praise of wisdom—

> The fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom,
> And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
> —(ix. 10.)

But this point of view is not peculiar to the writer of the opening chapters, as it certainly was not original with him. In the first collection of "proverbs of Solomon," we find—

> The fear of Jehovah is a fountain of life,
> To depart from the snares of death.—(xiv. 27.)

The significance of this cardinal and frequently repeated statement should be fully appreciated. The wisdom and knowledge of which "the wise" are about to speak are not mainly occupied with what we call the "inner life"; they have chiefly to do with conduct. The wise man professes to teach the most difficult of all lessons, how rightly to master the secrets, fulfil the duties, and overcome the temptations which meet all men in actual life; like St. Paul, he has "been initiated," or learnt the secret how to pass successfully through varying conditions of penury and abundance, and he is about to impart his knowledge

to those who are willing to learn. It makes simply a world of difference to all that follows, when he begins by saying that the starting-point of all such wisdom is to be found in a reverent acknowledgment of the covenant-keeping God, a pious and grateful recognition of dependence on Him as the source of all good.

We live in days when religion and science are habitually represented as opposed to one another. But this is not a phenomenon peculiar to the end of the nineteenth century. It is a very old complaint that the man of intellect is not religious as he should be, and that the "pious" man is apt to be weak in the head. Reason is opposed to revelation, and revelation is supposed to be subversive of reason. It is the strong feature of the literature we are now examining, that it will not hear of this mischievous divorce between constituent parts of man's nature. For the writers of Proverbs, religion means good sense, religion means mastery of affairs, religion means strength and manliness and success, religion means a well-furnished intellect employing the best means to accomplish the highest ends. The feebleness, the shallowness, the ignorance, the narrow, contracted views and aims, are on the other side. There is a healthy, vigorous tone about this kind of teaching which is never out of date, but which, human

nature being what it is, is only too apt to disappear in the actual presentation of religion in the Church on earth. Surely true reverence can only lead to further knowledge, and true knowledge can only be attained by the reverent spirit. But the reverent man allows his godly fear to degenerate into superstition and prejudice, and the man of research becomes vain-confident through his very successes; thus the rift is widened and the severance becomes complete. Dr. Arnold, after he had been many years at Rugby, left on record his experience of the little world of school in a most interesting passage, which is too long to quote. In the course of it he says: "I have still found that folly and thoughtlessness have gone to evil; that thought and manliness have been united with faith and goodness"; and he often used to dwell on "the fruit which he above all things longed for, moral thoughtfulness, the inquiring love of truth going along with the devoted love of goodness." This is the very definition of the Wisdom of the Proverbs. So far from looking down upon it as a kind of obsolete excellence belonging to the Old Covenant, the Christian may well set it as his goal which he will strive to reach under better auspices than the wisest of old time could boast. Few things are more necessary, in some regions of life at any rate,

than that "Mind and soul, according well, should make one music as before, but vaster." Man will never climb so high that he will outgrow the need of this elementary lesson of his intellectual primer: The fear of the Eternal, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding.

This recognition of God is not a kind of convenient phrase to place at the head of a treatise and then ignore in practice. The golden thread is intertwined with the whole web of the teaching of Proverbs, and appears and reappears more frequently than we can stay to illustrate. If it be said that the well-known passage—

> Trust in Jehovah with all thine heart,
> And lean not upon thine own understanding:
> In all thy ways acknowledge Him,
> And He shall make plain thy paths,

is in the opening discourses, it is easy to find an even stronger and fuller statement of similar truths in the first collection—

> Commit thy works unto Jehovah,
> And thy thoughts shall be established. . . .
> By the fear of Jehovah men depart from evil. . . .
> A man's heart deviseth his way,
> But Jehovah directeth his steps.—(xvi. 3, 7, 9.)

It is amongst the "words of the wise" that we find the injunction—

Let not thine heart envy sinners,
But live thou in the fear of Jehovah all the day;
—(xxiii. 17);

while it is in the second Solomonic collection that we find the strong statement—

Evil men understand not judgment,
But they that seek Jehovah understand all things.
—(xxviii. 5.)

Readers of the New Testament are sometimes startled to find the clause in St. John's First Epistle, "Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things." Would it surprise them to hear that an equally lofty utterance is to be found in a book of the Old Testament often pronounced "unspiritual"? The enlightenment of the intellectual and spiritual eyesight which belongs to those who seek the Lord and are taught by Him in secret would be better understood if the path of knowledge marked out in Proverbs were more freely and constantly trodden.

To show that this spiritual tone is not a rare or occasional feature of the book, or found upon certain subjects or in certain phrases only, take two entirely distinct examples from the 3rd chapter. In the 11th verse occurs that tender exhortation which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews declared his readers had forgotten:

"Whom Jehovah loveth He reproveth, as a father the son in whom he delighteth." In the 32nd verse of the same chapter we have not only what may be thought the trite statement that "the perverse is an abomination to Jehovah," but the deeply spiritual and significant counterpart, "His secret is with the upright." The word translated "secret" conveys all the meaning of the most intimate intercourse, the most private and privileged communication. It anticipates the saying of the Saviour to His disciples, "Henceforth I call you not servants but friends," and is one of a select class of passages in the Old Testament which shows that the fear of God, which was the characteristic virtue of the Old Covenant, by no means shut out the filial love of God, or excluded from Old Testament religion a large measure of that close and tender relation between God and His devoted follower which we associate for the most part with the fuller revelation and richer privileges of the New Covenant.

The religious spirit penetrates all parts of this varied book and all parts of the varied life it describes. Does the writer speak of family life? He says that it is Jehovah who blesses the habitation of the just (iii. 33). Does he connect righteousness and longevity, wickedness and sudden death? It is the fear of Jehovah that "addeth

days" (x. 27). Does he enter the region of commercial life and in plain terms denounce the tricks of business? He can find no stronger condemnation than to say that—

> A false balance is abomination to Jehovah,
> But a just weight is His delight.—(xi. 1.)

This proverb is repeated later on in the same collection in another form: "A stone and a stone, an ephah and an ephah,"—that is to say, double weights and measures, one large and one small, so that the one may be substituted deceitfully for the other,—"an abomination to Jehovah are they both" (xx. 10). There are many ways in which a moralist might point out the wicked folly of mocking at the poor: it is cowardly, it is cruel, it is unmanly, it may bring calamity upon the arrogant boaster. But the wise man of the Proverbs goes deeper still when he says, as he does in two several places, "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker" (see ch. xvii. 5, and xix. 17). In domestic life as in public duty, his spirit is still the same—

> Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing,
> And obtaineth favour of Jehovah.—(xviii. 22.)

The LXX. Version, the Syriac, the Targum, and the Vulgate versions read, "Whoso findeth a good

wife," and ch. xix. 14 tells us that "a prudent wife is from Jehovah"; but the text needs no eking out with explanatory epithets. The wise man finds in all *true* marriage a boon that is nothing short of Divine, and proves once more the essential religiousness of his whole view of life.

Is it still said that the mode of regarding life in this book is shallow, superficial, unspiritual?

> The Underworld and the Abyss are open before Jehovah;
> How much more, then, the hearts of the children of men!—(xv. 11.)

Here is a man to whom the whole universe is but a flimsy veil into which, through which, the All-piercing Eye can in a moment penetrate. By such a man, therefore, the whole world of human thought and purpose is viewed, not from an earthly, still less a worldly standpoint, but as by one who lives ever in the great Task-master's eye. Hence it is that he says elsewhere—

> Every way of a man is right in his own eyes,
> But Jehovah weigheth the hearts.—(xxi. 2.)

The next verse shows how truly spiritual is his religion, how far removed from that "making the best of both worlds," which seeks chiefly for the rewards of virtue, and hopes to become

acceptable to God by multiplied ceremonial observances: "To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to Jehovah than sacrifice." In the arts of peace and the conflicts of war "there is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor understanding against Jehovah"; the horse may be prepared against the day of battle, but victory comes from God alone (xxi. 30, 31). Finally, one of the clearest and most striking testimonies in the Old Testament to the reality and power of conscience, one which the New Testament rather re-echoes than surpasses, is to be found in this book—

> The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah,
> Searching all the inmost parts of the body.—(xx. 27.)

Our Lord may well have had this verse in mind when He spoke of the light within, which may so brightly illumine or itself be darkened till it leads to outer darkness. St. John may well have had this verse in mind when he spoke of the "light which lighteneth every man," the Eternal Word, the abiding source of inward light, coming, in the fulness of time, into the world. For the wise man, even in these comparatively early days, had been given to see that the self-conscious spirit of man, knowing the things of the man within him, searching into every corner, penetrating into every crevice of his moral and

spiritual nature, is indeed a divinely lighted lamp, casting its rays into recesses that would otherwise be as darkness itself. And a man who has grasped that truth is at least fairly on his way to become what St. Paul calls πνευματικός, a spiritual man. He has learned the secret of the Inner Light, has found the ladder which stretches from earth to heaven, and no longer can look upon the world with the lacklustre eye of the "carnal" man, anxious under the forms of religion, and by the paths of a conventional virtue, to attain to mere respectability, comfort, and what the world calls success.

We have lingered, perhaps, somewhat too long upon this point and needlessly laboured its exposition. But the reason will be found when we reach that which constitutes the main bulk of the teaching of Proverbs, and the time will not have been mis-spent if the essentially religious character of the book has been vindicated. So many commentators, moreover, some of them worthy of high respect, have made it their task to disparage the book, speaking of its "low degree of inspiration," and its prosaic, commonplace morality, that it has appeared necessary to draw special attention to the features on which we have been dwelling. The whole argument of this chapter may be crowned by a careful

consideration of the sublime personification of Wisdom which characterises the early chapters, and its identification with the Divine Thought and Purpose in the creation and maintenance of the universe.

To see this in its full development we must turn, of course, to the 8th chapter. But already, earlier in the book, the writer has prepared the way for the bold flight which he later essays. In the 1st chapter he finds it insufficient to describe Wisdom as an abstract quality, and draws a picture of her as a living figure, with a living voice of mingled entreaty and warning: "Wisdom crieth aloud; she uttereth her voice in the broad streets," and strong and penetrating are the tones of remonstrance in which she pleads with and threatens the crowd of fools and scorners who set at nought her counsel and will have none of her reproof. In the 3rd chapter Wisdom is extolled, not only as the giver of plenteousness and peace, but as having a share in the work of the Creator Himself—

> Jehovah by wisdom founded the earth,
> By understanding He established the heavens;
> By His knowledge the depths were broken up,
> And the clouds drop down the dew.

But these are only hints of what is to come. The bold and splendid personification of Wisdom

which fills the 8th chapter may be viewed only as poetry, a lofty reach of literary imagination. Doubtless it is this, and may be admired as literature; but surely it is much more. In this chapter the philosopher becomes the prophet. Here he is lifted above himself by the spirit of revelation. A measure of that spirit undoubtedly was necessary to write other parts of the Book of Proverbs, which manifest insight both into the truth of God and the nature of man. But in this chapter we can almost see the change pass over the face of the teacher as he becomes the Seer; we watch him being caught up into the third heavens and already anticipating visions of wonder which belong to the seventh heaven alone. What these glimpses are, and how deep the religious truths they reveal, we now proceed to see.

It is no small matter, and no accident, that Wisdom is here personified. The writer is compelled in spite of himself to extend the form of speech he has already used. "Doth not Wisdom cry, and Understanding put forth her voice? Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men." The subject of address is one which might be very differently treated. Men may be urged to avoid dishonesty, to abhor uncleanness, and to rise superior to sloth, in quite

another fashion. These are earthly vices, and may be rebuked by an earthly monitor. If the mentor would leave the level ground at all, it is open to him to represent virtue in the abstract as desirable, and to enlarge on the importance of sound principles. But he who speaks in the name of Jehovah feels that there is more than this to be said. The Wisdom that he celebrates is more than an abstraction, a metaphysical concept, formed by a generalisation from a number of instances. She lives, she acts, she speaks, she entreats. He who would describe her must allow her living voice to be heard, for nothing but the voice of a living person can set forth the imperative nature of the obligations, the solemnity of the sanctions, or the loveliness of the attractions, which belong to a word so sacred as Duty.

It is interesting to watch the spiral ascents by which the speaker leads us from earth to heaven. First the attractiveness of the qualities which Wisdom possesses in her human aspects are set forth, then the excellence of the gifts which she bestows upon those who follow her guidance. Truth, righteousness, straightforwardness in word and deed, these are amongst the elements of her teaching. Pride, arrogance, self-confidence in all its bold but essentially unlovely and unsubstantial manifestations, the children of

Wisdom will have learned to appraise at their true value, and avoid. A more effective knowledge, a truer and more abiding might, is hers and theirs (ver. 14). For the domain of Wisdom lies not only in personal, in family, in social life: "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth." True nobility, true sovereignty, true power to command and direct is the gift of Wisdom, and hers alone. More abundant gifts are in her hand. She is no abstract entity, but has a heart to love those who love her, to respond to those who ask her aid; she is an answering Spirit, ready to meet with prompt sympathy and help those who rise up early and seek diligently to find her. If riches are valued, she has an embarrassing plenitude of them in her gift. Pure and fine gold, choice silver, "durable riches," the honour which attends on wealth and the power it always wields—these are but a few of Wisdom's gifts. Those who love her "inherit substance," and however large their treasuries, she will fill them.

Thus far, however, we are upon the earth. However rich and choice the qualities and gifts that have been described, they belong to this lower sphere. If no more is to be said, we have hardly reached the standpoint of religion, and

some doubt may be entertained whether promises so lofty and unreserved are likely to be fulfilled. But such Wisdom is not human in its origin, or in its scope, or in its issues. It may operate on earth, its home is in heaven, its source and spring is Divine. So Plato argued, after his Greek fashion, that absolute beauty and goodness and truth do not belong to the material and transient life of earth, that Ideas are eternal, and that the soul must draw its knowledge of these permanent realities from a prior state of existence, and that—

> The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting,
> And cometh from afar.

So did Spenser in later days, after singing his hymns in honour of love and beauty, pray to be lifted on golden wings to those heights whence he might be enabled to sing the praises of Heavenly Love and Beauty. The poet who would celebrate earthly beauty and affection was conscious that he could not accomplish even this aright, unless that "immortal light" shone in upon his soul—

> For from the Eternal Truth it doth proceed,
> Through heavenly virtue which her beams do breed.

But the lesson had been taught long before. It

is the same which is taught in this "unspiritual" Book of Proverbs, when the writer makes Wisdom say—

> Jehovah possessed me in the beginning of His way,
> The first of His works of old.

Whether the word in the 22nd verse means "possessed," or "created," or "brought forth,"—a question on which divines anxious about delicate questions of Christology have written hundreds of profitless pages,—the thought is substantially the same, and it is a very lofty one. It amounts to no less than this, that the Wisdom by which man is to be guided in all the affairs of this lower life is substantially one with that which moved and guided the Divine Mind in those first thoughts which gave rise to the being and order of the universe itself. Wisdom such as man needs and may have for his guide is not human, it is Divine. It is not temporal, it is eternal. It is no transient expediency, no fugitive method of dealing with passing conditions and claims—

> I was set up from everlasting:
> From the beginning, before the foundations of the earth.

At length, and in highly poetical language, it is explained that Wisdom preceded the creation, and

then it is unfolded how Wisdom ordered and directed every part of it when it came into being. Not creation only, but providence is her work. She it was who called earth and seas into being; she it is who sets their place and bound, who issues to them her commandments, who "in number, weight, and measure still doth sweetly order all that is." But whilst it was the function of this Divine Wisdom to take part in the work of creation, to establish the heavens and mark out the foundations of the earth, it is represented that man is her chief delight, and her joy is most of all with the sons of men. Among all her excellent and supernal tasks, none is so lofty, none so congenial, as the devising and arranging for man, in whom she specially rejoices, and who can and should find his chief joy in her presence and service.

Very striking is some of the language in which this is set forth. Wisdom is represented both as a witness of the work which God Himself accomplishes, and as a helper in it. There is little doubt that the meaning of the somewhat singular word *'āmōn*, used in ver. 30, is "master-workman," or "director of the work,"—a strong, experienced, skilful servant, who is more than a servant, and who when charged with a duty may be trusted to carry it out, as the very right hand of the

master himself. But not less remarkable is the language of the rest of the sentence—

> Then I was by Him as director of the work;
> Then had I delight day by day,
> Sporting always before Him,
> Sporting in His habitable earth,
> And having my delight in the children of men.

There is a brightness and sprightliness in some of the words used in this striking passage which it is difficult to render into English without the appearance of levity. The joy which lights up the heart of Wisdom in their gracious work breaks forth into a smile upon her face. She rejoices in God, rejoices in man, rejoices in doing the will of God for the benefit of man. And the writer goes out of his way to use dainty and expressive words to illustrate the great truth that cheerfulness and joy belong to the realm of order, not of disorder; that true gaiety of heart belongs to wisdom, not to folly; that in creation there is not only Mind but Heart, not only grave and profound purpose, but overflowing joy. "God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good." Still He "renews His ancient rapture." There is a dancing as well as singing which belongs to worship and sacred things, though a Michal may fail to understand a David's holy and mirthful exultation. My delight, says

Wisdom, my lightsome, sportful, happy occupation, is with the sons of men, who, if they will but follow me, shall learn the secret of truly light-hearted, joyful service. What wonder that she turns, with that practical force which belongs to true wisdom, and utters the irresistible appeal—

> Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto me,
> For blessed are they that keep my ways.

Blessed indeed is he who sits long waiting and watching at the doors of such a teacher and benefactor. For not long do men wait and knock in vain at those doors. "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not."

The deeply religious significance of this teaching is obvious. The immense superiority of the view of the universe here presented to those current in other "sacred books of the East," and for that matter, of sundry scientific books of the West, needs no exposition or comment. That which lies at the origin and root of all things is not some monster of mythology, not dark Fate, nor incalculable Chance, nor blind and irresponsible Law, but Wisdom. Wisdom benign and gracious, in many of its aspects and operations doubtless above human comprehension, but in its creative and

providential work not beyond human apprehension; the highest conceivable exercise, indeed, of that same Wisdom which man is called upon to seek, obey, and follow. There is an anticipation here of the simple but profound truth which in Bacon's hands proved so potent, and which is the motive principle of the best modern science—man becomes the lord of Nature by being her faithful servant and interpreter. But there is more than this. The fundamental kinship of the human with the Divine, taught in the 1st chapter of Genesis in the words, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him," reappears here in another form, where man is taught to listen to the voice of that Wisdom which brought the earth into being, and maintains it in order and beauty. Man, too, in his measure, may cultivate that Wisdom which was with God in the creation, a "master-workman" directing the establishment of the clouds and the appointment of the foundations of the earth. To all this rich and suggestive religious teaching there is to be added the fruitful truth that Divine Wisdom delights in her work in man and for man, that she is not "harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose," but that happiness shines forth in the brightness of her smile, and music is breathed from the very tones of her voice.

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds ;
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong.

But just because there is in this wonderful chapter so much religious teaching as this, there are also hints and foreshadowings of more. How much more the writer himself saw we cannot say. A prophet cannot sound the depths of his own inspired words; and in this chapter, perhaps alone in the Book of Proverbs, there breathes the spirit of prophecy.

Wisdom is here represented as a firstborn of the Creator, a Mediator between God and man, itself Divine and personal, and finding special delight in humanity and things human. In all these respects the picture here drawn of the Wisdom of God portrays in shadowy outline the Person and Work of the Son of God. Not that the older expositors were justified in actually understanding the words as descriptive of the Eternal Son. The Wisdom here spoken of is Divine, but it is not God. It is personified, but it is not personal. It is created, not con-substantial with the Creator. It was before the world, but is not eternal. The description is the original of a striking passage in the Book of Wisdom, and forms the foundation for

some of the speculations of Philo, but it is hardly referred to in the New Testament. It is doubtful whether our Lord had any reference to it as prophetic of Himself when He said, "Wisdom is justified of all her children." The personification of a Divine attribute is far from being the same thing as the Incarnation of God Himself.

None the less, the anticipations of the passage are remarkable and instructive. They show us that all truth is of one piece, that when a writer follows the guidance of the Spirit of truth in one direction, he cannot avoid approaching the confines of other truths of which at the moment he may have no conception. In following up the pregnant thought, that the Wisdom which man is called upon to follow in the conduct of life cannot be a mere abstraction, but is indeed a living principle; that in this very Wisdom is exemplified the thought and purpose of God in creation; that in it is a chief link between God and man; that God delights in Wisdom, and Wisdom delights in men, and men may find their highest delight in her and in her service; the author of this chapter was coming very close to those fundamental truths which lie at the basis of the doctrine of the Incarnation. There is no recognition here of sin and the need of redemption, no hint here of sacrifice and the possibility of Divine self-sacri-

fice for man's sake; the deepest truths which are implied in Incarnation and Atonement are conspicuous by their absence. But on one side of the great many-sided central truth of the New Testament the 8th chapter of Proverbs approaches it very closely. The Greeks seek after wisdom; seek it and fail to find it. But to them that believe, the Lord Jesus Christ is not only the power of God, but the wisdom of God. He is made unto us not only righteousness, but Wisdom; and Himself is the embodied "Wisdom in a mystery" which His "perfect" or fully-instructed disciples alone can understand. The book which helps even Christians to see more deeply into the heart of such a mystery claims recognition as religious and even evangelical in its spirit. And if in the working out of a great theme the writers are more occupied with the fruits than with the roots of the religious life, it is quite clear that they are not amongst those who expect the fruits of righteousness without the root-principle of spiritual communion with God. They are servants of the Wisdom which is a "breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty; the brightness of the everlasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of His goodness." Thus they helped to prepare the way for Him who is indeed

"Firstborn of every creature," the effulgence of the Father's glory, and "the very image of His substance," through whom, and through whom alone, the Wisdom and Righteousness and Love of God has been made the portion of the frail and erring children of men.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: ITS ETHICAL TEACHING.

IN the Book of Proverbs there sound in the ears of men Two Voices; there are set before the feet of men Two Ways. For the Greek the same fundamental truth was set forth in the parable of the choice of Hercules; the Buddhist Pitakas oppose the Noble and the Evil Paths, between which a choice must be made; one of the earliest fragments of Christian literature, the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," opens with the words, "There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but great is the difference between the two ways."[1] The book we are studying has its characteristic mode of contrasting these two courses with their rival attractions and contrasted destinies; and the writers ring the changes upon the remarkable groups of synonyms in order to bring out their meaning more emphatically. These two diametrically opposed families of words are, on the one

[1] Perhaps with reference to Jer. xxi. 8, which see.

hand, *wisdom, understanding, knowledge, prudence, subtilty, instruction, discretion*; and, on the other, *folly, simplicity, brutishness, stupidity, ignorance, sottishness, villainy.* The English words do not in every case precisely correspond to a distinct Hebrew word; there are rather more synonyms in the Hebrew than we can find apt renderings for in our own language. The lists remind us of St. Paul's opposed bright and dark lists, of virtues and vices, fruits of the Spirit and works of the flesh; but it is characteristic of Proverbs that the seven or eight words which may be enumerated in each case are strictly synonyms, and represent only various shades of meaning of the two prevailing titles, Wisdom and Folly.

The first group contains the closely related words, *Binah*, i.e. the trained intelligence which rightly discriminates between things that differ and approves things that are excellent; *Tebhunah*, insight, discernment; *mūsār*, the instruction and discipline which leads to knowledge; *da'ath*, the resulting knowledge, acquired and possessed; *mezimmah*, the meditation or counsel which leads to discreet action; *'ormah* (more frequently in the adjectival form); and *sekel*, the prudence which results from careful consideration of consequences and wise judgment in relation to them; together with some other words, which need not be speci-

fied. It is noteworthy how many English words which by their etymology indicate only knowledge or skill have come to be used in a bad sense; *e.g.*, subtilty, cunning, knowingness, artfulness, craft and craftiness. In Hebrew there is a noble group of lofty words which we in these degenerate days find it hard to match, some of the words we are obliged to use in translation having associations of a lower or secondary kind of which we cannot rid them. For example, "prudence" and "discretion" give a much more worldly flavour to the virtues of which the Proverbs speak, than the original words convey; while with us "intelligence" and "understanding" have properly speaking no moral quality at all.

The ugly and contemptible group of figures that gather round Folly are also distinguished from one another by names for which we cannot readily find equivalents. The word most frequently used (sixty or seventy times) for the fool, *kesil*, points to that dense, headstrong self-confidence which leads almost certainly to moral delinquency; while another word (found some twenty times in Scripture) points perhaps to the perverseness, more probably to the weakness and aimlessness of folly. The *nabhal*, so far as etymology is concerned, might seem to indicate only the sapless, useless man who is, like withered

flowers or fruits, good for nothing; but in practice it is a stronger word, and points to a character which is rotten rather than merely withered, and therefore corrupt and corrupting. Another word points to the boasting of the fool and the folly of the boaster. Another word, again, *pethi*, might be translated either simple or simpleton; the former rendering pointing to the neutral character of the man who is but little instructed and so is easily led; while the latter points out the man who is incapable of receiving and using sound knowledge, and has therefore already crossed the border-line which separates the morally wise man from the fool. But in Hebrew, as in English and other languages, the word "simple" is rarely used in a good sense. Both "simple" and "silly," as Trench pointed out long ago, are witnesses to the depravity of man; words which originally had a pure, if not an excellent meaning coming to indicate folly or worse. "Innocent" is on its way to a similar degradation. These remarks would perhaps be out of place here, but they contain a noteworthy moral lesson, which is brought out more forcibly in Proverbs than in any other book of the Bible. He who is "simple" in a negative sense, unprovided with definite convictions, fixed principles, and firm resolve, is sadly far upon the way to become "simple" in a

positive and evil sense which implies moral blame and entails corresponding punishment. The simple who "believes every word" (xiv. 15) is very near akin to the simple who inherits folly (xiv. 18), and those other simple ones who "pass on and suffer for it" (xxii. 3, and xxvii. 12). The simplicity which is void of understanding (vii. 7) falls an easy prey to the simplicity—alas that such a word should have such a meaning! —which is only another word for wantonness (ix. 13).

It is to those who are simple in the milder sense of the word, not committed as yet either to the obedience of Wisdom or the pursuit of Folly, that the two voices are addressed, which utter their invitations in the opening chapters of Proverbs. Wisdom crieth aloud in the broad places, uttereth her voice "at the head of the noisy streets," "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" (i. 22). And again she takes her stand beside the gates of the city, at the point where all who come in and go out must pass and hear her pleading voice, "O ye simple, understand prudence; and ye foolish ones, be of an understanding heart" (viii. 5). But Lady Folly—"Madame Bubble," as Bunyan calls her—gives her invitation also. She utters her voice as publicly, and as it would seem, even

more persuasively, "Whoso is simple let him turn in hither," where stolen waters are sweet and forbidden fruit is tempting. And the simple it is who is attracted like the moth to the flame and who yields to the dulcet tones, for "he knoweth not that the shades are there"; the company of those that gather in the house of lewdness are already rotten-ripe for the grave, and "her guests are in the depths of hell" (ix. 18).

Most striking, however, is the lengthened description of Wisdom's stately palace and rich banquet, the preparations made, the bounties provided, the attractiveness of the maidens who sing her praises, and issue her invitations, and dispense her bountiful hospitality, as given in the former part of the 9th chapter. It is a royal feast and on a royal scale, but the dainties, though excellent of their kind, are not seductive, intoxicating with a delight which ends in shame and degradation. The invitation is to all who will come, but it is the simple who are chiefly urged to avail themselves of it. For them there is yet time and opportunity, if they will but "forsake the simple and live, and walk in the way of understanding." Many centuries after these words were written, a wiser than the wise man who wrote them, even Wisdom Incarnate, uttered His voice and gave His invitation to a yet

more royal feast. The house was builded, the pillars were hewn, the beasts were slain, the bread was broken, the wine was mingled, and free invitation was given to a banquet more rich and rare than Solomon himself had ever dreamed of. But those who were asked to the wedding made light of the royal bounty thus universally offered, and both simple and scorners refused the gospel of the grace of God. So true it has proved in all ages, though never so clearly seen as in the mission of Christ, that the message of Wisdom is a touchstone which tries men, a winnowing-fan which sifts and parts them, discriminating between metal and alloy, between wheat and chaff—

> Fining-pot for silver and furnace for gold,
> But Jehovah trieth the hearts.—(xvii. 3.)

We are prepared by these opening sentences for ethics which are truly religious. There is no room for the merely superficial virtues and graces, the application of conventional standards, in a world where such searching tests divide men ever into one or other of two deeply contrasted classes. If some of the maxims we are about to examine touch only the surface of life, we shall know beforehand that these are not supposed to represent all the truth. The "minor morals" have

their place in a well-ordered character, and it is well they should have their place in the Bible. Much harm is done through lack of duly observing the canons which rule in this region of life. Small sins are often great offences. A dead fly will cause the precious ointment to send forth a stinking savour; and the fragrance of a good man's life may be marred by his blundering and offending in lesser matters, where the candle of a proverb would be enough to guide him. The spiritual man knows that he must not hold his head too high in the air, or he will trip over a little stone. But he knows also that the guarding against little stones will not suffice to keep him in the right road. The wise man who is about to speak concerning homely duties and commonplace ethics is perfectly aware of this. He knows, as well as his nineteenth-century critics can tell him, that the fountains of life lie deep down, far below the surface of good manners and kindly attentions and decorous observances. The springs of personal joy and sorrow lie apart from the well-trodden ways along which he is erecting helpful finger-posts—

> The heart knoweth the soul's trouble,
> And no stranger can meddle with its joy.
> —(xiv. 10.)

Not that we "mortal millions" need to "live

alone," but that, when all the maxims of the sages are uttered and perhaps attended to, there remains that deepest life of all which lies below, which belongs to the hidden man of the heart, in which others have no portion but that to which he chooses to admit them, and the true sweetness or bitterness of the cup of life depends upon the sweetness or bitterness of those secret founts of feeling. Wherefore—

> Keep thy heart above all thy keepings,
> For from it are the issues of life.—(iv. 23.)

Wisdom is not likely to be a mere whitener of sepulchres, or to cleanse only the outside of the cup and platter. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall find mercy" (xxviii. 13). What more sound advice can the evangelical teacher give than does this "moralist" of the Old Testament? The ethics of Proverbs undoubtedly have their root in religion; for the careful reader will not fail to observe that the extracts just given come from all parts of this composite book. With the exception of the brief appendices, written on special subjects, every section or collection of proverbial sayings contains sentences which show that the moral philosopher was first of all the devoutly religious man.

Coming, however, to the details of the moral code as expounded by this book, we shall do well for a moment to notice the emphasis laid upon the period of youth, and the importance of education and training. It is true that the words "my son" are not to be understood literally, any more than St. John's "my little children." The addresses of the earlier chapters, and perhaps of ch. xxiii. 15 and 19, are to be understood as given to the disciple rather than to the child. But when allowance is made for this, and we bear in mind that the young in knowledge and experience needs training as well as the young in years, there are still numerous passages in Proverbs in which those who are literally children are spoken of. Of this part of the teaching of Proverbs it may perhaps be said that it inculcates old-fashioned truths and methods which some who have the credit of being amongst the wisest of this generation are disposed to slight and disparage, but to which it will certainly be necessary to return, so long as human nature remains what it is. Education, indeed, is a word on everyone's lips in this latter half of the nineteenth century; but the member of Parliament, and the candidate for the School Board, and the publicist who discusses educational questions, do not mean by the word what Solomon meant. Intellectual educa-

tion is the modern panacea for all ills; the moral education which the wise man insisted on is at a discount. Authority is at a low ebb; discipline is becoming obsolete; the young in years and the young in experience are alike wiser than their fathers. There is an old-world strain about the proverbs which teach filial obedience, the need of correction, the importance of bearing and submitting to reproof, which makes them sound out of date in modern society. There is no need to insist upon a literal interpretation of the "rod" mentioned in ch. xiii. 24, and elsewhere, for the word often means only what is described in the latter part of the above verse as correction or restraint, whilst other passages undoubtedly refer to chastisement in the literal sense. But the first lesson of all which the children of Wisdom need to lay to heart is the absolute necessity of *discipline.* The word occurs twice in the first two verses of the book, after the title has been given. That which the Jew called מוּסָר, which the Greeks called *παιδεία*, and which we may define as "instruction imparted by way of discipline," is of the very essence of the teaching of Wisdom. He who has not come to know this, as true for childhood, youth, and manhood alike, has his alphabet yet to learn, and needs more than anything else the instruction which is

given in the lowest form of the school of Divine Wisdom. The surest mark of a fool is that he "hates correction."

The moralist must be specific in his denunciations of evil, or his warnings will evaporate in vague generalities; he must not be too specific in his descriptions, or his pages will scatter germs of disease instead of diffusing health. The Book of Proverbs is plain-spoken to a degree, but none was ever attracted to evil by any of its undraped pictures of wrong-doing. One of the best-known summaries of the fruits of folly is given in the description of the "worthless person," or man of Belial, in the 6th chapter. In it we find a list which indirectly formed the origin of the "Seven Deadly Sins" which were so openly denounced in the teaching of the mediæval Church, but which our more fastidious age seldom names—

> There be six things which Jehovah hateth,
> Yea seven, which are an abomination unto Him:
> Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
> And hands that shed innocent blood,
> A heart that deviseth thoughts of evil,
> Feet that hastily run to wickedness,
> A false witness that breatheth out lies,
> And he that soweth discord among brethren.
> —(vi. 16–19.)

It will be seen that this is not an accurate description of seven distinct vices. Lying occurs

twice: the phrase which describes the evil heart is general in its character, though it may refer to impure thoughts; while the description (5) of the feet ready for mischief can hardly be distinguished from (3) and (6). The seven deadly sins of the Roman Catholic Church are (1) Pride, (2) Avarice, (3) Luxury, (4) Envy, (5) Anger, (6) Acedia, (7) Gluttony. This clearly is a list not of actual transgressions, but of states or dispositions which are the fruitful sources of transgression. It reminds us partly of this list in Proverbs, partly of the list of sins punished in the circles of Dante's *Inferno*. We shall find all distinctly recognised in the Book of Proverbs, even down to that sixth source of mischief, which we have left in the original Latin because it is hard to translate, but which might perhaps be rendered Sullen Gloom.[1] None of the fountains of pollution which darken, embitter, and poison the stream of human life are neglected by this ethical philosopher of long ago. In addition to plain and uncompromising denunciation of certain obvious and glaring evils, we shall find a number of subtle observations which mark the close student of human nature and the wise teacher who is himself taught by the Spirit of

[1] See a most instructive essay on "Accidie," in *The Spirit of Discipline, and Other Sermons*, by Dr. Francis Paget, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford.

God. All vices spring from one source, the evil heart. So the Proverbs tell us. But they show us also the divers fruits of this corrupt tree; so many, so different, and capable of such disguise, that without detailed exposure many of them might escape detection. Let us, as the most convenient way of examining the body of the book, pursue this ethical teaching in its details.

It will not surprise us to find that such gross evils as Falsehood, Pride, Envy, Lust, Sloth, and Avarice are unflinchingly exposed and unsparingly condemned. The proportion of space that is given to each may, however, be unexpected, as well as the treatment which each severally receives. We cannot, in the case of a book like the Proverbs, refer with any confidence to a particular state of society as illustrated in the maxims, since they probably refer to several periods, and some of them appear to have come gradually into use, and to have been worn into different shapes by the handling of successive generations. Again, it is natural that certain forms of evil should be animadverted upon in the proverbial philosophy of a nation, whilst others, quite as serious in the eyes of the moralist, comparatively speaking, escape. If we generalise, however, upon the book as a whole, we are probably struck with the prominence which is given to Impurity, Sloth,

and Sins of the Tongue. There may have been special reasons for this, or it may be said that in any state of society evil tendencies in these directions are more or less rife, and call for the condemnation of the sage rather than the legislator. In any case the predominance remains, and the Book of Proverbs has been of untold value in exposing and lashing with unsparing severity these sadly prevalent social sins.

Let us begin with the treatment of Anger. It is noticeable that in the case of this, as of almost every sin, special attention is drawn to its close connection with Folly. Anger is one of her eldest born. A "short madness" Horace called it long ago, but the wise man before him had said, "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly," but "he that is slow to anger is of great understanding" (xiv. 17, 29). Anger leads to folly, is the teaching of the Roman satirist; folly is the parent of anger, is the deeper teaching of the Jewish sage. Both are, of course, true; but the causes of anger lie deep down in the nature and disposition, deeper than one who only marks the passionate ebullition might be disposed to think. On the other hand, while nothing seems so easy as to repress the manifestations of hasty temper, which to a cool bystander appear so childish, experience shows that nothing is more characteristic of a truly

strong man than his power of self-control, whether upon trifling or serious provocation. It is proverbial that many are more disturbed by the lesser annoyances than by the greater troubles of life. Temper is more tried by little trials, nature by severe afflictions. He who can control himself under pressure of both kinds is wise and strong indeed.

> He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
> And he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.
> —(xvi. 32.)

The folly of passion is shown in the shrewd saying (xii. 16), "The fool makes known his vexation on the [same] day," *i.e.* at once; or, as some render, "in the daytime," *i.e.* allows everyone to see it. Even prudence would suggest a measure of reticence; but "he that is hasty of spirit brings his folly into full view" (xiv. 29), as no one sees more plainly than himself when it is too late. That anger is itself the parent of many evils could not escape the attention of such an observer. He tells us that the scornfully wrathful man "sets a city in a flame"; fuel for the flame is not likely to be wanting, and—

> As coals to hot embers and wood to fire,
> So is a contentious man to inflame strife.—(xxvi. 21.)

Anger is the source of many evils in the passion-

ate man's own heart and life, but it is also the fruitful parent of all kinds of mischief around him. He is a madman "scattering firebrands, arrows, and death"; his words are sown as seeds, but they prove to be dragon's teeth, from which spring up armed men. To show, however, that the attitude of this book towards anger is not superficial, dealing with the mere external manifestations of angry feeling, take that deep saying, "Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all transgressions" (x. 12). How deep the clear water of that saying is, we might not have observed, had it not been for the light shed upon it by St. Peter and St. Paul, who show us how "love covereth a multitude of sins," and "love covereth all things."[1] In a moment the wise man who had been touching with light but skilful hand the surface of the great sea of human character, sinks his plummet down many thousand fathoms to the depths, touching the solid bed-rock of gospel truth. How to secure that all-enduring, all-covering love, however, it was not given to a writer in Proverbs to say.

Pride and Envy come naturally next to anger.

[1] 1 Pet. iv. 8, and 1 Cor. xiii. 4. (R.V. margin). If we retain the translation "beareth all things," the meaning is not substantially different. It is the "covering" of patient endurance, not of cowardly concealment, that Prov. x. 12. commends.

"By pride cometh contention"; how many baneful roots of strife would perish to-morrow if the great tap-root of pride and envy and jealousy were cut off. There are two ways of dealing with pride. One is to show the proud man that his arrogance is suicidal; he is not on the way to promotion, but to abasement.

> Pride goeth before destruction,
> And a haughty spirit before a fall.—(xvi. 18.)

A nobler way is to show the man who would stand well in his own eyes a better path to true elevation of spirit; and in the first collection of proverbs he is twice told that "Before honour is humility" (xv. 33, xviii. 12). Is it to be inferred that Solomon in all his glory had learned this profound lesson; or that, while taught it in early life by that celestial Wisdom which was granted him in response to his own request, his heart forgot its own precious lore and declined upon the lower path of mere earthly dignity and splendour? Or was this a lesson of later time which Solomon never had the grace to learn?

Closely akin to pride is envy or jealousy. These are not quite identical, but one word describes them both in the Hebrew, a word which fittingly describes the inward raging which both excite, like a fire glowing more and more with inward

heat, a passion which maintains and intensifies itself by its own self-consumption. How striking on this subject is the proverb—

> A tranquil heart is the life of the body,
> But envy is rottenness in the bones.—(xiv. 30.)

Only the calm, self-possessed spirit, which has learned the secret of doing its own work and being content with filling worthily its own place, can preserve and build up life and steadily promote its well-being. The envious man, inwardly fuming and perpetually exasperated by a comparison between himself and others, nurses in his own body a disease which is rapidly working his own disintegration. The machine is tearing itself to pieces by the very way in which it does its work; or, as the proverb more forcibly expresses it, in the bones of the man's body decay has set in, and rottenness is corrupting its very framework. As to the effect of jealousy upon others, language could hardly be more emphatic—

> Anger is fierce, and wrath is a roaring flood;
> But who can stand before jealousy?—(xxvii. 4.)

If the manifestation of anger is a mark of folly, to hide it by lying or cloak it by slander is no better (x. 18). The secret snare may be more deadly than the open assault. The liar is constantly

spoken of in Scripture as the false witness, because in Eastern courts of justice the giving of false evidence was at the same time so common and so terribly mischievous. But, as in the case of the ninth commandment, so in the Proverbs, false witness is not to be understood as confined to testimony before tribunals. The chief mischief is done before the judgment-seat of God and the bar of society, and the liar incurs condemnation and punishment from both. "Lying lips are an abomination to Jehovah," is a saying more than once found in these pages; and twice in the same chapter we are told, "A false witness shall not go unpunished" (xix. 5, 9). Falsehood surely deserves such punishment, for—

> A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour
> Is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.—(xxv. 18.)

Like a hammer his lie crushes down the tender purity of innocence, and the cowardly bully adds to his injury the natural but intolerable insolence of hating those whom he has crushed (xxvi. 28). But his day is coming. He may find his momentary triumph to be gratifying, but it contains within itself the seeds of a bitter and shameful overthrow—

> Bread of falsehood is sweet to a man,
> But afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.
> —(xx. 17.)

Sins of the tongue are closely allied together. The flatterer is own cousin to the liar. The tale-bearer may not always be a slanderer, but he seldom can bring himself to preserve the savourless simplicity of the actual truth. Nay, the talkative man — so powerful and untamable a steed is the tongue when it is once mounted—has by the very incontinence of his lips made himself one of the children of Folly. To illustrate these statements from Proverbs would mean to transcribe a large part of the book. The power of the "unruly member" for good or evil has never been more forcibly stated than in the aphorism, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue"; or in the expanded forms of the same thought, "The mouth of the foolish is a present destruction," "The tongue of the wise is health" (see xviii. 21, x. 14, xii. 18). As to the mischief caused by angry, violent, slanderous, and even inconsiderate words, the proverbs multiply illustrations in vain to express it. Rash words are like the piercings of a sword, angry words are like fiery arrows. Agur compares the violent words which compel strife, to the "churning of milk which bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose which bringeth forth blood," the word "pressing" being used in each case to show the point of the comparison. But the tattler who does not mean

mischief may be a greater pest than the man of violent and overbearing speech. A perverse man may diffuse contention, but it is the privilege of the whisperer to separate chief friends (xvi. 28). "To be wroth with one we love doth work like madness in the brain," and it is the proud prerogative of the talebearer to boast that he can plant stings in the tenderest spots of the heart's life, that he can cause an unspeakable and intolerable agony in the noblest breasts, such as the violent man is incapable of producing; for the wretched gossip-monger, retailing half-truths that are worse than lies, brings about misunderstanding, estrangement, and parting between "very friends." Even to "harp on a matter" is enough, says this student of human nature (xvii. 9); mere continued rubbing on the same place will produce an open sore that will not soon heal. The contemplation of such wanton and irremediable mischief sets one longing that condign punishment should visit such an offender. If it be any comfort to know it, we are assured that as "a fool's mouth calleth for stripes," so his very "mouth is his own destruction" (xviii. 6, 7). A lying tongue, again, we are told, is "but for a moment," and the wise man is evidently of the same opinion as the psalmist: "What shall be given unto thee, and what shall be done more unto thee, thou deceitful

tongue? Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper."

It must not be supposed, however, that the moralist contents himself with exposing and denouncing evil. In his antithetic mode of speech he has much to set on the other side, as he describes the wholesome, purifying, strengthening effect of kind and pleasant words. "The pure speak pleasant words" (xv. 26), words which are "as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul and health to the bones" (xvi. 24). A brave, true, kindly word spoken in season—not as of one "that singeth songs to a heavy heart," not as of one anxious above all things to speak "with a smooth tongue," but a "word of the wise," informed by judgment and truth as well as by kindness and sympathy—of how priceless a boon is this! Even reproof may be esteemed as fine gold, and the wise know how to estimate it at its real value. "Reprove a wise man and he will love thee," such oil upon the head he welcomes, not refuses. Finally—for the subject is well-nigh inexhaustible—it is not difficult to guess where St. James had learned some of his lessons concerning the bridling of the tongue, when he taught that men should be swift to hear, slow to speak. Not in vain had he learned from childhood that—

> Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue
> Keepeth his soul from troubles.—(xxi. 23.)

If there is one figure more than another in the large and various retinue of Folly whom the wise man in this book makes his butt and scorn, it is the sluggard. We should come almost to pity him, so many are the barbed arrows of raillery sent quivering into his flesh, but that he is so thick-skinned and dense, he feels none of them. The "slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting"; he caught it without trouble and now is too lazy to cook it. Nay, he turns in his bed "like a door on its hinges" (xxvi. 14), turns over, but does not turn out.

> The sluggard burieth his hand in the dish;
> It wearieth him to bring it again to his mouth.
> —(xxvi. 15.)

And—

> The sluggard saith, There is a lion without,
> I shall be murdered in the streets.
> —(xxii. 13.)

It is undoubtedly with a fine irony, lost upon its object, that Wisdom bids this heavy do-nothing to go to the ant for instruction, to consider her ways and be wise. For though his vineyard is grown over with thorns and nettles, the stone wall broken down, and the ground overrun with weeds and desolate, the owner is the last to know or believe it, and a masterly touch gives the explanation that—

> The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit
> Than seven men that can render a reason.—(xxvi. 16.)

But while the slothful present a broad mark for the missiles of satiric humour, the wise man who writes in the fear of God takes a grave and serious, not a light and trifling view of evil. Fools make a mock at sin. It is not enough to tell the sluggard that "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come as a robber, and thy want as an armed man." Sloth is viewed not as a mere negative fault, bringing loss and trouble upon him who indulges in it. It represents a deep defect of character. The slothful is "brother to him that is a destroyer" (xviii. 9). It is one of the characteristics of the fool to be sluggish of heart, heavy, impenetrable to wisdom and goodness, and in this deeper moral condemnation of a character which might seem hardly aggressive enough in evil to be sternly judged, the wise man anticipates the judgment of the Master, who condemned to outer darkness the "wicked," because the "slothful servant." John Bunyan seldom misses an impressive moral lesson of this kind. In his allegory, Sloth is punished side by side with Simple and Presumption. They were asleep when Christian went by; when Christiana passed the same way, "behold they were hanged

up in irons a little way off on the other side." It seemed a hard fate for those who only slept away their time, but this was not all. As "they were for sloth and folly themselves, they taught others to presume they should do well at last." They "turned several out of the way," Short-wind, No-heart, Linger-after-Lust, and "one Sleepy-head, with a young woman whose name was Dull," whom they persuaded to lounge about and idle away their time instead of pursuing the sacred but arduous pilgrimage. Thus does the allegorist point the lesson which he had doubtless learned from the wise moralist of Proverbs, that there is a closer kinship between sloth and wickedness, between sluggishness of spirit and high-handed presumption, than may have been supposed.

> For the backsliding of the simple shall slay them,
> And the careless ease of fools shall destroy them.—(i. 32.)

The companion picture of Diligence, which serves as a foil to this, is as refreshing as it is encouraging. The "hand of the diligent maketh rich," the "soul of the diligent shall be made fat," the "thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness."

> Seest thou a man diligent in his business?
> He shall stand before kings,
> He shall not stand before mean men.—(xxii. 29.)

Industry is not merely a pathway to wealth, it is a moral virtue of no mean order. It is needed not only in the physical world, the intellectual world, the business world, the moral world, but in the spiritual world also. He who has not yet learned to "scorn delights and live laborious days" in order to attain in life's high enterprise, is no true disciple of Wisdom. The need of diligence, of patient continuance in well-doing, is one of her fundamental lessons. So we find it laid down in a later book of wisdom, Ecclesiastes, "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." So we find it far more impressively taught and at the same time perfectly illustrated by Him who said, "We[1] must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." When the Master deigns thus to associate His servants with Himself as friends and co-labourers in the lofty task of doing diligently the Father's will, what purer and stronger stimulus to holy industry can we conceive? Can any disciple, hearing such words, ever afterwards remain a spiritual sluggard?

[1] So the Revised Version reads in John ix. 4, instead of "I must work," upon decidedly preponderating evidence.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS: ITS ETHICAL TEACHING (*continued*).

IT is characteristic of the book we are examining that it gives due place to the *human* virtues in the formation of character. Theological virtues are not forgotten, and there is a much closer connexion between these distinct types of excellence than some would have us believe. The Book of Proverbs, as we have shown, can touch a deep spiritual chord when necessary. But its distinctive place among the books of the Bible lies in its enforcement of the importance of "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are venerable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report." The wise man is the enemy of the mean and shabby, as well as of the impure and dishonest. He finds time to praise cheerfulness and courtesy, as well as the fear of the Lord and devoutness

of spirit. And this, because he sees the close connexion between the two. Wisdom is justified by her power to guide her children aright in manners as well as in morals.

Amongst the suggestive words that are not very frequently found in the book is "faithfulness." Sometimes the word is simply synonymous with "righteous," as when the psalmist complains that "the godly man ceaseth, the faithful fail from among the children of men." But for the most part it points to that rare and invaluable quality of character which St. Paul places among the fruits of the Spirit; the πίστις which A.V. translated "faith," but the R.V. more correctly "faithfulness." He who trusts and can be trusted; he who "sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not," presenting a delightful contrast to the shallow, leaky, shuffling "talebearer"; a man true to his conscience, true to his friend, and true to all men, because true to his God: the price of such a man is above rubies. "A faithful witness will not lie," and how hard the Oriental finds it not to lie under severe pressure, those who have lived in the East well know. "He that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter"; not when it is one that ought to be made known, not when concealment involves misunderstanding and shame and injustice to others. But those

who attend too exclusively to the spiritual side of religion may fail to see how great a gift it is and how much grace it often requires for a man simply to hold his tongue. The gossip is rarely faithful—

> Like [a drink] cooled with snow in time of harvest
> So is a faithful messenger to them that send him:
> He refresheth the soul of his master.—(xxv. 13.)

A faithful man indeed "shall abound with blessings"; but the excellence is as rare as it is transcendent—

> Many a one meeteth them that are kind to him:
> But a faithful man who can find?—(xx. 6.)

Generosity is not forgotten. True, we do not find in the Proverbs a recognition of that high standard of kindness to the unthankful and the evil which is the distinguishing glory of the New Testament, but there is a fuller anticipation of it than the hasty reader of the book would gather. The blessedness of giving is recognised: "For the liberal soul" (lit. "soul of blessing") "shall be made fat,and he that watereth shall be watered also himself." It is in this book, moreover, that the injunction is found which St. James so expressively adapts, "Say not to thy neighbour, Go and come again and to-morrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee." But there are costlier gifts than

food and money, and many a man can be generous with his substance who is chary of affection and magnanimous forgiveness. How far has Wisdom advanced beyond Law, when instead of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," we read—

> If thine enemy hunger, give him bread to eat;
> If he thirst, give him water to drink:
> For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head,
> And Jehovah shall reward thee.—(xxv. 21, 22.)

It is true that the mocking spirit which delights to detract and deny, has explained that the shame and humiliation thus heaped upon the adversary are supposed to be so grateful to the feelings of the injured man, that he finds in this a part of his reward. But such ignoble exposition only reveals ignobility in the commentator. The burning spoken of is evidently wholesome and purifying, though it has its painful elements. To bring a man to a sense of his unworthiness cleanses and raises, while it shames him; and as St. Paul shows, this is the only "vengeance" which the righteous man ever seeks, while such reward as he looks for comes from God alone. Another very striking injunction, which we must not stay to expound, is found in ch. xxiv. 11, "Deliver them that are carried away unto death," etc. The passage cannot mean that the righteous course of justice is rashly to be interfered with,

but it gives a most significant hint that "mercy glorieth against judgment"; it contains a principle which would indefinitely raise the character of most Eastern tribunals, and needs to be borne in mind under the more humane procedure of Western courts in later times; while it affords one more proof that the wise men who composed or compiled the Proverbs of Solomon had many a glimpse of a Wisdom higher than that with which their time and their order has usually been credited.

Cheerfulness hardly ranks among the virtues. Yet how many excellent people would double their own happiness and quadruple their influence for good, if it ever occurred to them that it is a duty for a Christian man to be cheerful and help to make others so. Within limits, of course: cheerfulness is not an end in itself, but a most desirable means to a number of still more desirable ends. The New Testament has its own message to give on this matter, but the music of the Bible would lack one characteristic note were it not for the book which teaches that "he that is of a cheerful heart hath a continual feast" (xv. 15), and that—

> A merry heart is a good medicine,
> But a broken spirit drieth up the bones.—(xvii. 22.)

The wise man is quite aware that "the laughter

of fools is like the crackling of thorns under a pot," though that particular proverb does not occur in this book. But as an excellent machine may grate heavily for lack of oil, or even generate mischief by needless friction, so many a devout and devoted man needs to be reminded of the "time to laugh," and to lay it well to heart that a cheerful spirit and bright, hopeful outlook, such as is possible to a man whose conscience is at peace with God and man, furnishes at the same time food and medicine, lightening the toil and easing the journey of life for himself and all around him.

Much light is cast by the Book of Proverbs on the social life of the times reflected in it, and on the social danger and duties of all times. It is instructive to observe how closely the standard here erected corresponds with that of the prophets. The prophet is understood to be a man who pours forth impassioned utterances under a direct inspiration which impels him vehemently to denounce evil-doers, however influential or popular. The writer in Proverbs is supposed to be a cold, calculating moralist, who indites "safe," conventional maxims of a commonplace character. But we find striking parallels between the two teachers, the substance of their doctrine being often the same, though the form is very different.

There is, moreover, the same plain-spokenness in seer and sage. Both go direct to the point and denounce evil without any very nice consideration of phrases. The prophet's words burn and glow, they are more interesting to read and more moving to the feelings, but there is a quiet, penetrative power about the more severely restrained speech of the wise man, which makes his words to be easily remembered and readily quoted, and which probably gave them in many cases an acute and abiding sting.

There is one form of evil in particular of which it is not easy to speak, but which breeds rottenness in society, as it does in the individual heart that cherishes it, and this the wise man denounces without any mincing of words. The number of passages which warn against the "strange woman" and her allurements is somewhat remarkable. It might seem as if Solomon himself were placing on record the results of his own bitter experience. But false delicacy is here no kindness. Impurity is a sin which must be fled from, not encountered; but if occasionally it becomes necessary to speak of it, the most direct and uncompromising terms are the best. So does Hogarth rebuke vice in his Rake's Progress; all the superficial glamour of temptation has vanished, and sin is seen in its native hideousness. The secrecy in which this

evil lurks explains half its power. All evil hates the light, but the attractions of this vice are banished by the cold, clear, terrible, all-exposing day. "Everything that is made manifest is light"; and many a young man has had cause to bless the unshrinking directness which made him ashamed and afraid of that loathly shape of lewdness which hugs the darkness and hates the dawn.

Impurity wears many disguises, and has a whole stock of fair masks wherewith to hide an ugly face. They are all taken off, one after another, in the opening chapters of this book. There is no need that we should pursue this painful, though necessary, process of exposure. But we should miss one key to a full comprehension of this book if we omitted to notice that the chosen contrast to the pure, sweet, grave picture of Wisdom clad in virgin-white, is the gaudily-coloured figure, with its meretricious attractions, of My Lady Folly. The profligate youth who "knows his way about" the purlieus of the great sinful city is supposed to be specially knowing; he is the man of the world, who has graduated in the school of unholy experience, and "knows life," while the innocent, pure-minded youth is held to be a greenhorn and simpleton. How scathing the irony with which the wise man

tears off this wretched threadbare cloak! It is the voluptuary and debauchee who is really the simpleton. The fool is the man who counts *that* sort of knowledge worth having. The young man "void of understanding" is he whom a creature so impudent and bedizened as the strange woman can attract. Coarser of nature and more dull of perception than the "ox that goeth to the slaughter," this would-be wise man goes open-eyed to his ruin. To compare the foolish youth to an ox going to slaughter, or a bird entering a snare, seems unfair to the "lower" creation. Yet the wise man nowhere more clearly shows his wisdom than in not underestimating the dangers of this subtle and deadly temptation. In better moments a man may say, as Hazael did *not* say, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" But "he that trusteth his own heart is a fool"; and amongst the slain of My Lady Folly have been many of the wise and great and strong.

> For she hath cast down many wounded,
> Yea, all her slain are a mighty host.
> Her house is the way to the grave,
> Going down to the chambers of death.—(vii. 26.)

Another form of evil which figures somewhat largely in the Proverbs—at first sight it is not easy to see why—is suretiship. It might for a moment appear that the readiness to be bound for

a friend is a virtue, and even if such engagements be sometimes unwisely entered upon, that the evil is not a very serious one. It is quite certain that the Proverbs do not disparage true friendship; on the contrary, they extol it in words which remind us how rare and inestimable a blessing a loyal friend is. He "loveth at all times, and is a brother born for adversity." There is a friend that "sticketh closer than a brother," and the man who has proved the pricelessness of such a treasure will not need to be exhorted, "Thine own friend and thy father's friend, forsake not." Such a friend, however, does not ask another to be surety for him; and he who is in danger from suretiship is not of the stuff of which such friends are made. It is the "stranger" who asks for more than he is entitled to (vi. 1, and xi. 15), and it is the man void of understanding who readily strikes hands and becomes surety for a sum he cannot pay (xvii. 18, and xxii. 26, 27). There may be a decided flavour of worldly wisdom about the adage, as if it simply bade a man take good care of his own interests—

> He that is surety for a stranger shall smart for it,
> But he that hateth suretiship is ~~sure~~. secure

A little consideration, however, shows that the wise man is not as shallow as his critics. The use

of money is an index of character. The greatest Teacher the world has ever known laid a surprising stress upon this, when He came to apply the parable of the Unjust Steward. The young man who enters into such monetary engagements as are condemned in the Proverbs is in the first place morally weak, in the second place practically dishonest, and in the third place he will probably entail much suffering upon those who have deserved better at his hands.

As a matter of fact, the common-sense teaching of this book concerning business matters is far more nearly akin to the higher spiritual teaching which is usually characteristic of the Bible than men are ready to believe. The whole of our life needs to be moralised or spiritualised. If any part of it is omitted as unimportant, a sure Nemesis speedily follows. The surging sea of evil can make its way through any undefended part of the dyke, and then the whole country may be submerged. In some states of society this has been forgotten. The subject of wealth, its production, its distribution, its use, has been handed over to the department of things secular. The evangelical teacher, perhaps, is esteemed not as spiritual as he ought to be, if he leaves the truths of the gospel to descant upon the duties of capital and labour. But Divine Wisdom is all-embracing

in her scope. She does not begin with the uses of money, as if man's character could be shaped from without; but she does not omit to show how important in their place are those material considerations which necessarily figure so largely in our life as it now is. The wise man neither worships wealth nor despises it. He treats it as what it is, a great power. It may be unjustly gained, then it is like a rich garment which infects him who wears it with a plague he cannot cure; it may be foolishly squandered or abused to promote injustice and oppression, then it hurts others as well as the fool or knave who has possessed himself of edged tools which he does not know how to use. Wealth makes many friends (xix. 4), and makes room for its possessor before great men (xviii. 16). It is a high wall and a strong tower, but it is apt to be more so in the estimation of the rich man himself than it is in reality (xviii. 11). Much depends upon the use made of this excellent servant but bad master. Much depends upon the way in which it has been gained—

> He that oppresseth the poor to increase his gain,
> And he that giveth to the rich, cometh only to want.
> —(xxii. 16.)

> He that augmenteth his substance by usury and increase
> Gathereth it for him that hath pity on the poor.
> —(xxviii. 8.)

Poverty in itself, however, is no excellence. The poor man is apt soon to lose his friends (xix. 4); as a borrower, he is little better than the slave of the rich lender (xxii. 7). But the poor may be "rich in faith," or, as the Old Testament teacher puts it, in wisdom. The "poor man that walketh in his integrity" is the subject of deserved eulogium; he has understanding and can "search out," *i.e.* see through and rise superior to the pretensions of the rich man who has nothing better than his riches to boast of. There is a whole gospel for the poor to be drawn from the Book of Proverbs. There are half-a-dozen Hebrew words to describe various kinds and degrees of poverty, as, indeed, during the later days of the Jewish monarchy there were needy and destitute persons belonging to all classes, from the slave to the man of high social position who in days of war and anarchy might suddenly be overtaken by calamity and end his days in want. The treatment of the poor is a subject on which this book has much to say. They were specially cared for among the Jews, as we know, by humane legislation, but the proverb imposes a duty which the law could not exact, and promises a blessing which no law ever had the power to bestow—

> Remove not the ancient landmark,
> And enter not into the fields of the fatherless;

For their Redeemer is strong,
He shall plead their cause against thee.
—(xxiii. 10, 11.)

Frequent reading at the most sacred service of Christian worship has familiarised us with the words—

He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord,
And his good deed will He pay him again.—(xix. 17.)

Agur's prayer in the 30th chapter prevents us from forgetting that both rich and poor have characteristic temptations, which, however, the man of the middle class, who is neither wealthy nor destitute, cannot wholly escape. The experience of generations cannot more accurately express the spiritual dangers of the man of substance than the words, "lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is Jehovah?" nor those of the poor than his description of the danger of dishonesty and of "using profanely the name of my God." Extracts on this important subject might easily be multiplied, but even this hasty survey may teach a generation like ours, which is specially occupied with questions concerning the accumulation and distribution of wealth, that there are many lessons in the Proverbs by no means obsolete, though they were framed for a very different state of society from our own. There is enough

even in a few of the pregnant maxims of this book to bring to an end much of the misery caused by the unequal distribution of wealth, which always has obtained thus far in the history of mankind, and which probably always will obtain to the end. "Weary not thyself to be rich"; "There is that scattereth and yet increaseth, and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty"; "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed"; "Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith"; "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver or gold." So speaks Wisdom, who at the same time nowhere disparages wealth, and heartily commends those who are diligent in the lawful pursuit of it. Who will say that on the lines laid down in Proverbs alone the social problems which are exercising so many minds to-day might not be largely solved? For their fuller solution we have to wait till a greater than Solomon has revealed that new moral dynamic by which alone the sage counsels of proverbial wisdom can be carried out in actual life.

A number of maxims bearing on social and civil life circle round the subject of Woman and Kingly Government. The Eastern opinion of woman, speaking broadly, is low. Woman is

very largely what man makes her or allows her to be, and in countries where polygamy is practised or even tolerated, where the seclusion of women is esteemed a necessity, and the education of women a mistake, if not a crime, it is not likely that she will attain her true mental and moral stature. Israel in this respect contrasted favourably with nations around. The spirit of legislation was lofty and humane. The types of womanly excellence which adorned Israëlitish history established precedents of the highest value. Still, what may be called the Oriental taint of thought on the subject of sex prevented the highest ideal not only from being realised, but from being entertained. The proverbial wisdom of a country is a reflex not of the highest, but of the current average standard of conduct. That the tone of the Proverbs on this subject is as high and noble as it is, is a testimony to the elevating influence of Old Testament religion. In Ecclesiasticus, dating from the second century before Christ, and, for that matter, in Ecclesiastes, the tone is perceptibly lowered.

The condition of woman is at the same time an index and a test of the condition of society. "Woman by constitutional character goes into all, like water; she should be clean who plies so close." The Book of Proverbs is never weary of

insisting upon the importance of Family Life, and in its description of the home gives woman perhaps as prominent a place as has ever been given her in any stage of civilisation. As wife and mother, everything depends on her—

> A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband,
> But she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.—(xii. 4.)

The disciple is bidden not only to keep his father's commandment, but "not to forsake the teaching of his mother." Ah, that mother's *Torah*! Who shall say for how much Israel was indebted to it, until the time came when Timothy was taught by his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois, or that other Child appeared of whom it is said in the same verse that He was subject to His mother, and that she kept all His sayings in her heart! The true excellence of woman is celebrated in these Proverbs. The wise man does not think he exalts her by putting her out of her place. "A gracious woman retaineth honour"; the "wise woman buildeth her house." As the 31st chapter shows at length, her throne and her glory is the home. Who rules the home, rules the State. But woman's sway is not to be won by a contest for pre-eminence. The Proverbs have no pity for the contentious woman. Better to dwell "in the corner of a housetop," or even "in

a desert land, than with a contentious and fretful woman" (xxi. 9, 19). She is like "a continual dropping in a very rainy day," and the wiser the sage, the better he knows how foolish is any attempt to check the irritating and irrepressible storm—

> He that would restrain her restraineth the wind,
> And his right hand encountereth oil.—(xxvii. 16.)

He does not spare her follies. "Like a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman that is without discretion." Gallantry is out of place here. But something far better than gallantry, which does more honour to woman than a half-mock respect paid to her superficial attractions, is found in the ode to the virtuous woman with which the whole book closes. A society which could produce such a picture, even though it were not often fully realised, must have been sound and wholesome at the core. The virtuous woman is "more precious than rubies"; the "heart of her husband trusteth in her"; she "worketh willingly with her hands," "looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." "Strength and dignity are her clothing, thus she laugheth at the future day"; for who feels more independent of the chances and changes of life than he who has a true wife and a happy home? She "openeth her

mouth with wisdom, and the law of kindness is on her tongue." And the truly religious artist who painted this exquisite picture shows what to him was the deep-lying explanation of all its loveliness and attraction—

> Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain;
> But a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised.

We must not linger over the teaching of Proverbs concerning the State. It is neither so full nor so explicit as that which deals with the Family. It was not always safe to speak out on the subject of government. Moreover, experiences differed, and at one time in Jewish history it might seem that the powers that be are ordained of God; at another, that human authority was but a gloomy cloud of oppression, hiding the sunshine of Divine justice. Some commentators think they can discern a difference of tone between the earlier and later proverbs, the earlier reflecting a brighter and more hopeful tone concerning earthly kingship. But unfortunately these "earlier" proverbs are considered by some high authorities to be in reality a record of later times. There can be no question, however, concerning the fundamental principles of government; and here, again, the wise man is in complete accord with the prophet, though his language is more guarded and re-

strained. Great is the power of the Eastern king for good or evil. Some of the figures which are used to express this are very striking. The wise and righteous king is like a great winnowing-fan on the upland threshing-floor; sitting on the throne of judgment, he "winnoweth away evil with his eyes," and he "winnoweth the wicked, and bringeth the threshing-wheel over them" (xx. 8, 26). The king's wrath is "as a roaring lion," "as the messenger of death"; but his favour is as the dew and as a "cloud of the latter rain." There is a touch of worldly wisdom, such as we have met with before, in the advice—

> My son, honour thou Jehovah and the king,
> And meddle not with them who are given to change;
> For their calamity riseth suddenly,
> And the end of their years, who knoweth it?
>
> (xxiv. 20, 21.)

This watchword of conservatism needs a little examination before it is indiscriminately applied to bolster up abuses in government or errors in doctrine, simply because they exist. The eminently cautious spirit expressed in the words has its uses, but general maxims are easily coined and easily misapplied. It is more to the purpose to observe that whatever the nature of civil government, the wise man discerns only one principle which can make it truly stable and truly

fruitful in those benefits to the subject for which all legitimate government has been instituted. The king's heart is—that is, ought to be—"in the hand of Jehovah as the watercourses: He turneth it whithersoever He will." It is an abomination to kings—that is, it ought to be—"to commit wickedness, for the throne is established by righteousness." Finally, the day will never dawn and the form of civil government will never be discovered, in aristocracy, democracy, plutocracy, ochlocracy, or theocracy, in which it will cease to be true that

> Righteousness exalteth a nation,
> But sin is a reproach to any people.—(xiv. 34.)

This chapter may fittingly close with a few remarks on the rewards of virtue as set forth in the Book of Proverbs. It is perhaps this feature which more than any other has given colour to the charge of worldliness and selfishness to its maxims. Their scope seems narrow, it is said, their horizon painfully limited. Doubtless honesty is the best policy—sometimes; but in any case a sacred book should be concerned with something higher than "policy," however excellent. What is more, some of these promising generalisations concerning the prosperity of the righteous and the pleasant earthly gifts of Wisdom

do not seem to be borne out by facts; and so, we are told, the promises of the book are as delusive as the motive they hold out is sordid and unworthy. Really, however, these objectors to the teaching of the Bible concerning the rewards of righteousness are rather hard to please. If the prospects of a future life are dwelt upon, the teaching is accused of "other-worldliness"; if those of the present life, the tone is held to be utilitarian and selfish. If no reward at all is spoken of, such spiritual teaching is complained of as being abstract and impalpable, and however lofty, lacking in power and actuality. Rightly understood, Scripture teaching may be defended on all counts of this indictment. There is no small danger lest two very different things should be confused together. The prospect of happiness need not be a motive for action, still less the chief and prevailing motive. The spirit which is constantly asking "What shall we have, therefore?" is condemned by our Lord, whether the reward sought is to be enjoyed in earth or heaven. A man who translates the price of Wisdom into gold and rubies has yet to understand the meaning of the word. But one who believes in the moral government of the universe is bound to believe that sooner or later, it may be in this world or it may be in another, consequences and conduct

will be shown to correspond. Right and wrong in the world within must be recognised as such in the world without. This was Kant's argument when he contended that immortality is a postulate of the Practical Reason. The reason cannot acquiesce in injustice, or the lack of correspondence between right and might, duty and reward. If the balance hangs awry here, it will be redressed at last. So far from this being an immoral doctrine, or one which favours selfish and lower motives, it is one of the very axioms of conscience. The good man must look forward to the triumph of goodness, though he does not follow goodness simply because it will bring him triumph in the end.

Scripture teaches this in many tones. The tone adopted in the Proverbs accords with the stage of Divine revelation which had been reached at the time. Hardly any light is cast on the subject of a future life in the Old Testament. A Jewish saint could not inculcate patience, because in another life, "this world shall be thrust down and we upborne." The arena was before him on the earth, and death bounded his horizon. His faith in God and his experience alike taught him that in the present life the righteous were rewarded and the wicked punished. Retribution is not peculiar to a future life. Wisdom leads to

success. The fool morally is a simpleton intellectually. It is, of course, easy to perceive a host of apparent exceptions to the rule. The righteous might be oppressed, the fool be in high place and great power, and the wise man was not free from the temptation to envy sinners and "fret himself" because of their prosperity. But he could look beyond.

> Truly there is a future,
> And thy hope shall not come to nought.—(xxiii. 18.)
>
> There will be no future to the evil man,
> The lamp of the wicked shall be put out.—(xxiv. 20.)

It was the thought of this *'acharith*, the "latter end," that which should be by and by, he could not tell when or how, which sustained the godly Israelite among the complexities of life. On this he rests his soul in the Proverbs. On this the wisest must rest his soul to-day. There is One who knows, He will requite in due time. He requites now; quite sufficiently for us to discern the principles of His government, the motions of His will. At the last—whether in this life or not, is after all a detail—He will requite fully, and in the faith of this the wise man orders his conduct continually. All the language of the Proverbs, as of the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, must be understood in the light of this fundamental truth.

But it is not correct to represent this book as laying sole or chief stress upon the external rewards of virtue. If any part of the Bible specially celebrates virtue as its own reward, surely it is the opening chapters of Proverbs. The glowing language which describes the beauty and honour of Wisdom is not to be interpreted of the material blessings she brings in her train. That these were entirely absent from the mind of the writer, is not likely; that they formed the chief recommendation of Wisdom in his eyes, is incredible. As merchandise, she "is better than silver, and her gain than fine gold." If she is "more precious than rubies," her value cannot be estimated in terms of gold and precious stones. If "she is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her," it is not for what she gives, but for what she is. True—

> Exalt her, and she shall promote thee,
> She shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.
> She shall give to thy head a chaplet of grace,
> A crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.—(iv. 8, 9.)

But the reader's own eye must be strangely coloured by earthly visions if he can suppose that these words were intended to mean, Follow

Wisdom in order to gain a good place at court and dress in purple and jewels every day.

On the other hand, it is not only a legitimate motive with which to ply an evil-doer to show him that calamity dogs his footsteps; it is sometimes the only one that will reach him. The ways of transgressors are hard; but not usually so at first. That is a lesson of experience which comes later, which the fool is slow to learn at the lips of Wisdom. Accordingly, it is pressed home in this book, sometimes with very great power. It is not for nothing that we read of sins of uncleanness—

> His own iniquities lay hold of the evil-doer,
> And with the cords of his sin is he held fast.—(v. 22.)

The figures which describe the rottenness and corruption to which impurity leads, the utter disintegration of character and happiness which falsehood and selfishness must result in, are sometimes so literally realised as hardly to be figures at all. So truly does Heaven make "of our pleasant vices, instruments to plague us," or rather, plants the very seeds of disease and death in the fruit of the garden of which the Lord has said, Thou shalt not eat of it. The teaching of the Book of Proverbs is not the whole teaching of the Bible, there are notes in the fuller range

of its celestial music which the sage and moralist cannot reach. But the teaching of the wise man is of eternal and universal value. It can never grow obsolete. The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ does but enforce and transcend, not supersede it. If the Proverbs teach the terrible evil of sin, nowhere do they make it so tremendous as it appears in the light of the Cross, and not till Wisdom Incarnate appeared could it be understood how true is the wise man's eulogium of his gracious, heavenly Guide, "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

CHAPTER X.

ECCLESIASTES: ITS AUTHORSHIP AND DESIGN.

IN the formation of the Old Testament Canon there appear to have been a few books concerning the admission of which some doubt was entertained. It is hardly correct to speak of these as *Antilegomena*, as if they precisely corresponded to those books of the New Testament which for some time were "spoken against," *i.e.* not universally accepted as canonical, and only admitted into the sacred list after centuries of probation. Our information with regard to the way in which the Old Testament Canon was formed is scanty, and when the light of history begins to dawn, it appears—*e.g.* from Josephus—that a definite number of books had already received the stamp of tradition as belonging to the Holy Writings, a number which was never afterwards altered. It remains true, however, that as early as the first century of our era, there was a measure of doubt and

discussion concerning three books, numbered amongst the *Megilloth* or Rolls, viz. Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Esther. The way in which these doubts were raised shows that the books had already received the sanction of Jewish tradition, but it was felt that they were open to criticism, chiefly on the ground of difficulties raised by their contents.

In the case of Ecclesiastes such questionings are not to be wondered at. It was objected that its statements are contradictory, that some of its sentiments tended to infidelity, and that it ought to pass into oblivion because it asserts that the creatures of God are vain, and prefers transient pleasures to higher things. It was defended, partly on the ground that it bore the name of Solomon, partly that it had been very early quoted as Scripture, and partly on the ground that it begins with the Law and ends with the Law —a statement easily enough borne out by ch. xii. 13, but only intelligible as regards its former part by a characteristic rabbinical interpretation of ch. i. 3. Some of the traditions to which we have referred in the above greatly condensed statement are demonstrably of very early date, others have come down to us through Jerome and the later tradition of the Midrash. On the whole, the facts seem to have been these. The Canon of

the Old Testament was virtually closed by about 100 B.C. It was formally or officially closed at the so-called Council of Jamnia about 100 A.D. The discussions concerning a few of the books, fragmentary accounts of which have come down to us, arose chiefly about the latter period. They do not affect the historical position of (for example) Ecclesiastes, it being implied throughout that the book was already included among the sacred Scriptures. But they show that considerable freedom of criticism was permitted within the Jewish Church concerning the doctrine of the several books, their internal consistency and reconcilability with the *Torah* or Law, which always remained the standard. The book which was felt to be one of the most difficult to harmonise with the general tenor of Old Testament teaching is the one which now claims our attention.

The very name of the book is more or less of a riddle. It appears to have been coined by the writer, and the precise shade of meaning intended by it is still open to question. Our name Ecclesiastes comes from the rendering given in the Greek version of the Hebrew *Koheleth*. The root *Kahal* means to call together or gather; it may be understood of gathering maxims, or, more properly, to the assembling of men and addressing them as assembled. But a feminine participle

of the root in question is used here, conveying a peculiar official signification, and applicable either to Wisdom personified, or to the writer as occupying an office of dignity and responsibility. It is clear that in interpreting a word not found elsewhere, derived from a root with more than one appropriate meaning, and occurring in a form open to more than one explanation, there is abundant room for difference of opinion. The following are some of the explanations that have received support from recognised authorities. One of the earliest, given in the Midrash and substantially adopted by Jerome and Luther, is that with which English readers are most familiar, viz. that Koheleth means preacher, in the ordinary acceptation of the word. This, however, is not the meaning of the root, nor in accordance with the facts. Grotius and others understand the word to mean "compiler of maxims"; others, "the gatherer back to God of those who have wandered in the paths of doubt"; whilst others hold that it corresponds to the Greek sophist, meaning a philosopher whose professional business it is to give oral instruction to a school of disciples. Some high authorities[1] consider the feminine ter-

[1] Including Ewald, Ginsburg, Kuenen, and others. Gesenius, Delitzsch, and Cheyne adopt the view described in the latter part of the sentence.

mination to denote the personification of Wisdom, in harmony with the language of Prov. i., viii., ix., etc.; whilst others see in it only a late Hebrew usage to designate the holder of an office. The late Dean Plumptre would render the word *Debater*. The Revisers in their margin have suggested *The Great Orator*, and Professor Cheyne suggests *The Ideal Teacher*. It is probably impossible to find an English phrase which would fully convey the meaning of the Hebrew, if it be correctly understood by the following long periphrasis—one officially discharging the duties of a teacher in the schools, conducting a discussion concerning grave questions of faith and conduct, which he desires to bring to satisfactory issue. We seem to need a combination of the renderings "Debater" and "Ideal Teacher." It will be easiest to preserve the name Koheleth, understanding it in somewhat the above sense.

Who is the author of the book? How are the opening words, "the son of David, king (over Israel, ver. 12) in Jerusalem," to be understood? Does the book claim to have been written by Solomon, and can such claim be sustained? That the book is in some sense ascribed to Solomon is obvious. No one else answers to the description given, and from the earliest times the words have been so understood. It must not, however, be

taken for granted that Solomon is spoken of as the author of the book. The use by another of Solomon's name and the putting of certain words into Solomon's mouth is a literary form which does not imply anything of the nature of fraud or imposition, if it is done for the purposes of the composition. The name, the reputation, the history and experience of Solomon as a sort of representative of Jewish wisdom may well be used in sacred literature for the purpose of pointing the moral lessons of a later day. The book known as the "Wisdom of Solomon," composed in Greek probably not long before our era, thus dramatically puts words into Solomon's mouth, though without naming him, which the author can never have intended to be read as Solomon's own composition.[1] It is clear that the chronicler in similar fashion puts words into David's lips which were thought appropriately to express his feelings at the festival of the consecration of the tabernacle.[2] Pseudonymous writing does not necessarily, does not usually, imply any desire to deceive. But in this case there is not even the ascription of the book as such to Solomon as its actual author; it is rather that Solomon is represented at the outset as

[1] See Wisd. vii. 1, viii. 10, ix. 1.

[2] 1 Chron. xvi. 7–36; cf. Pss. cv., xcvi., cvi.

actor and speaker in relation to the discussion that follows. This will appear more clearly upon closer examination.

The usual form of superscription (compare Prov. i. 1, and Song i. 1) is not found. On the other hand, as we have seen, the name Koheleth points to a kind of ideal or representative use of Solomon's name. It is said in ch. i. 12, "I *was* king over Israel in Jerusalem," a form of speech which perhaps does not conclusively prove that Solomon did not write the words, for it might be rendered "I have been king," and be placed in the mouth of one who still occupied the throne. But it is not a phrase which one still sitting on the throne would be likely to adopt, and the words of ch. i. 16, "I have gotten me great wisdom above all that were before me over Jerusalem," present great difficulty, on the supposition that Solomon wrote them. The preposition used means "over," not "in" (though some MSS. read "in"); and if the text be correct, it seems somewhat strained to apply the phrase to a "line of unknown Jebusite rulers." On the other hand, we can hardly imagine any writer using Solomon's name to commit the glaring anachronism of making him compare himself with a long line of royal predecessors, when he had only one. Instead of insisting upon the meaning of a phrase, however,

it is more satisfactory to point to more general considerations which show that the description is one of Solomon ideally conceived by another writer, not of his actual history narrated by himself. The language in which Solomon's unparalleled wisdom and wealth and greatness are spoken of (i. 16, ii. 7–9) would be unseemly in the lips of the king himself, even allowing for the measure of self-laudation in which Oriental kings often indulged. It is unlikely that Solomon, with a recognised heir to the crown, would speak so uncertainly of "the man that shall be after me," as he does in ch. ii. 18, 19. The language used concerning the kingly office, found in ch. viii. 2–9, in ch. x. 16–18, and elsewhere, is quite inappropriate in the lips of a king, and seems to show that the temporary impersonation of Solomon has been dropped. But the strongest argument of this kind is to be found in the general description of tyranny and oppression implied in several parts of the book. The 8th chapter, for example, describes a state of affairs by no means corresponding with that of the early Jewish monarchy; and even if we may assume that under Solomon in all his glory a great deal of oppression and of resulting misery existed, it is almost absurd to imagine that Solomon himself could speak of it as does the writer of Ecclesiastes.

The matter, however, is placed almost beyond the pale of argument by the linguistic peculiarities of the book. The argument for date drawn from language cannot very often be relied upon in the Old Testament. There are a few cases, however, in which it may not only be used, but pressed, and this is one of them. "If the Book of Koheleth were of old Solomonic origin," says Delitzsch, "then there is no history of the Hebrew language." The peculiar words used are not the most striking proof of late date, though a few of these would be almost conclusive. Some of the grammatical forms used are much more akin to Aramaic usage than to that of classical Hebrew. In the use of pronouns and of words, as well as in the prevailing mode of connecting clauses in a narrative, we have what almost amounts to proof positive that Ecclesiastes is one of the latest, if not the very latest book of the Old Testament.

This is so generally recognised now amongst scholars, that the last few pages of argument may seem to have been wasted. We have thought it worth while, however, to summarise the chief considerations which have led to this conclusion, because in Ecclesiastes we have a crucial instance of valid criticism. From the earliest times both Jewish and Christian commentators have been content to accept the apparent asser-

tion of Solomonic authorship in ch. i. as conclusive. If Solomon's name is used, Solomon's hand must have written the book; so the popular logic has run, and learned opinion has freely argued. To-day, so moderate a writer as Dr. Plumptre, writing a Commentary "for schools and colleges," says, "No one now dreams of ascribing [the book] to Solomon." What is the conclusion? Not that destructive critics of all kinds are to be believed on their own authority, still less that the language of Scripture which indicates authorship may be lightly treated; but that long and respectable tradition may be mistaken, that the most obvious or most literal meaning of Scripture language may not be the right one, that impersonation does not necessarily imply fraud, and that caution is needed in rejecting as well as in accepting the claims of criticism. Rashness, shallowness, baseless theorising, straining of Scripture language to suit a preconceived hypothesis, may be found on either side in the conflict of Criticism *versus* Tradition. The Book of Koheleth has certainly lost nothing, biblical doctrine has lost nothing—on the contrary, both have gained much—by the change in opinion concerning its authorship and date. It may be so also with other books of the Old Testament, though the evidence be not so strong and convincing. Every question must be

judged on its own merits, but undoubtedly the decision in the case of Ecclesiastes is an evidence of the value of sound and carefully conducted criticism.

It is not necessary to attempt to fix a date for the book with any precision. It is post-Exilic, and was probably composed long after the Exile; but it is probably pre-Maccabean. The question whether Koheleth contains Greek words or ideas has been carefully argued by Canon Cheyne,[1] who comes to the conclusion that there are no Græcisms in the language of the book, and he does not incline to the view that the author has been to any appreciable extent influenced by Stoic, Epicurean, or other Greek schools of thought. The writer is "a native Hebrew philosopher." On the other hand, a comparison of Ecclesiastes with Ecclesiasticus and Wisdom shows that it was in all probability prior to both. In the case of Ecclesiasticus, particularly, the coincidences are numerous and striking. They can hardly be accidental, and in almost every case are such as to show that the son of Sirach made use of Koheleth, which was probably numbered by him amongst "the rest of the [sacred] books" to which

[1] *Job and Solomon*, ch. xi. p. 260. In opposition to the arguments of Mr. Tyler and Dean Plumptre, who, however, present a plausible case.

he alludes in his prologue. We are brought, therefore, to a date somewhere between the later years of the Persian rule, say, about 350 B.C. as the earliest, and 200 B.C. as the latest possible.[1] Our knowledge of the period in question is too scanty to speak with precision; but, generally speaking, it may be said that the political references of the book point to the earlier date, though they admit of the later; while the language, style, and perhaps the ideas of the book, point to the later date, though they are not inconsistent with the earlier.

If we take the latter part of the fourth or the earlier part of the third century before Christ, as approximately the period in which this book was composed, we must remember that we are taking our stand at a point 300 years after the fall of Jerusalem, 250 after the Return from Captivity, and 150 after the time of Nehemiah. Koheleth contains many allusions to the luxury, oppression, and maladministration of the later Persian Empire. The passage, ch. v. 8, 9, "If thou seest the oppression of the poor and the violent taking away of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter, for one higher

[1] Ewald, Ginsburg, Delitzsch, Cheyne favour the earlier of these dates; Kuenen, Dean Plumptre, and others the later. Canon Driver speaks doubtfully but inclines to the third century B.C.

than the high regardeth, and there be higher than they," appears to refer to the system of government by satraps, one grade of officials rising above another, while references abound to the weakness and incapacity of princes, and that sure sign of misgovernment so common in Eastern states, the rapid promotion of low-born favourites. It was dangerous to speak even in private against such abuses (x. 20); while ill weeds grew apace, the good and faithful were repressed and even persecuted, and the whole fabric of the State is graphically represented in the words, "By slothfulness the roof sinketh in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaneth." It is not to be wondered at if hope grew dim and love grew cold and weak, if gloomy words darkened the religious faith even of the best men, and a certain prudential enjoyment of the passing hour seemed sometimes to be the only thing left in life worth living for.

The late Dean Plumptre has prefixed to his Commentary on Ecclesiastes an "ideal biography" of the writer. Fancy is, of course, the artist in such a picture, and some of the touches are fanciful indeed, with hardly the slenderest foundation in fact. But some of the conjectures as to the kind of life Koheleth lived are credible enough, more or less drawn from the book itself, and suggest at least the kind of man who wrote this

remarkable book. According to this sketch, he is a Jew belonging to a wealthy family, living in Judæa but not in Jersualem, trained in the Law, familiar with the Proverbs of Solomon, but with little religious life or fervour around him to sustain or quicken the good impressions derived from studying the Scriptures. The religious fervour of the Maccabees and the movement which gave rise to the Pharisaism of later times is still in the distance, whilst the Jews were surrounded by Syrian, Greek, and other influences which diminished the zeal and rounded off the characteristic features of their religious faith. Formalism and hypocrisy abounded. Social life was anything but pure, as was probable when woman was light in character and lightly esteemed. In manhood Koheleth travelled. He visited Alexandria, which under the government of the Ptolemies swarmed with Jews. Here he lived the life of the "gilded youth" of the place, enjoying the delights of wine, women, and song, wasting his substance, like the prodigal, in riotous living. After satiety, bitterness; after pleasure, cynicism. The *roué* turns moralist, of a sour and sceptical sort at best. He looks round upon life as one who has proved its hollowness. He has been disappointed in friendship and in love. "Art, culture, pleasure, failed to soothe him.

There fell on him the 'blank misgivings' of which Wordsworth speaks, the profound sense of nothingness which John Stuart Mill describes so vividly in his Autobiography, what the Germans call *Weltschmerz,* the burden of the universe, or in Koheleth's own phrase, the 'world set in the heart' (iii. 11); the sense of an infinity and eternity which man strives in vain to measure or apprehend." He turns therefore to the Greek sages, as represented by the Stoics and Epicureans of the time. He became a debater in their schools, and though attracted by some aspects of the teaching to which he listened, found that this too was vanity and a feeding on wind. Then came "premature old age"; paralysis set in, and he began to come to a better mind. He experienced a religious reaction, returned to his early belief in God and in providence, and in this, the latest stage of his experience, set himself to record his thoughts, which, arranged in an unsystematic and somewhat desultory form, are before us in Ecclesiastes.

All this is but a dream, yet the narrative of the dream as given by the scholarly and imaginative writer will certainly prove a help to the comprehension of a difficult book, provided it be treated with that delicate reserve with which such stuff as dreams are made of should be

handled. We are prepared, at all events, to take Dean Plumptre's account as one among many possible ones of a book which has received almost as many interpretations as commentators. Before glancing at the design of the book, as it has been variously understood by generations of puzzled interpreters, we must consider for a moment the question of its integrity. Has it come down to us just as it left the hands of the original author, or has it been in any way modified, or "edited" by subsequent writers? In particular, is the epilogue (xii. 9–14) a part of the original composition? It may be said at once that it is impossible here to discuss such critical views of the book as virtually dismember it, or change its character. It is asserted by some that Ecclesiastes as we have it is a "tissue of disjointed aphorisms and contradictory theses," that as it stands it is a maze without a plan, defying all attempts to give a consistent meaning to the whole. Accordingly the book must be reconstructed, and the critics attempt to show that its present condition is due to a transposition of some of the original sheets of the Hebrew from their places, together with a number of deliberate interpolations. The result of the reconstruction, which omits altogether such significant passages as ch. xii. 7, alters the meaning of others, and makes the book to end with

ch. xii. 8, is to present us with a duly trimmed and shaped "Buddhistic" treatise, such as might have proceeded from any pessimistic and virtually atheistic philosopher, with *Vanitas Vanitatum* for its motto and cynicism for its moral atmosphere.[1] Such a theory is, of course, a counsel of despair. If the book is to be taken to pieces and only such parts of it retained as modern critics can weave into a consistent whole which commends itself to them, our exegesis must be reconstructed. We think it only right to take the book as it stands. It is still, however, open to argument whether the last six or seven verses were written by the author himself, and if so, what relation they bear to the rest.

At first sight there appears much to be said for the supposition that the epilogue forms a kind of external attestation, like the closing verses of St. John's Gospel, in which certain unknown brethren testify concerning the "disciple who wrote these things," and declare that his testimony is true. This closing passage is a description of Koheleth in the third person, whereas elsewhere in the book he speaks of himself in the first; it contains

[1] The theory referred to in the text, due to Professor Bickell of Vienna, has received support from a few scholars. A popular presentation of it in English was given by Dr. E. J. Dillon, in the *Contemporary Review*, February 1894.

a kind of eulogium upon the speaker, which would be out of place in the author's mouth; and it is much more explicit in its doctrine, perhaps more orthodox, than the body of the book itself. The epilogue seems to survey the book as from the outside, to judge of it, appraise and commend it, and reads better if understood to proceed from another than the writer. These considerations have commended themselves to some of the best modern critics,[1] and their arguments would appear conclusive in the case of an ordinary book. It is not customary for the writer of a treatise to discuss himself and his merits in the third person before taking leave of his readers. But this is not an ordinary book. If Solomon were understood to be the author of the main portion, this epilogue would constitute an additional difficulty, but we are proceeding on the assumption that the writer has used Solomon's name, with a peculiar official title, for the purpose of discussing in his own way a number of grave and difficult questions. A personage is introduced in ch. i. 1, bearing a well-known name, but appearing in a new character. In the first eleven verses the subject which Solomon is about to discuss, like a debater in the

[1] *E.g.*, Dr. Plumptre and Professor Cheyne; Delitzsch and Ginsburg, on the other hand, hold that the epilogue was written by the author.

schools, is introduced, and a narrative portion follows. From time to time he speaks in the first person, or delivers himself of general maxims bearing on his theme. In the epilogue it may well be supposed that the writer drops the slight veil which he has assumed for a special purpose, and points out in his own person the character and bearing of the discussion which has preceded. It is not so unusual, moreover, for Eastern authors to dwell on their own qualifications for the task they have undertaken, and it is quite as likely that these concluding verses correspond more to the subject-matter of an author's preface than the contents of a printer's colophon. So at least some of the best interpreters of the book contend, and having presented in outline the arguments on both sides, we reserve till the next chapter a full exposition of our own view, which is necessarily bound up with the view taken of the scope of the whole book. It will be seen, however, that a perfectly intelligible account may be given of the closing verses on either supposition, while a decision can hardly be arrived at apart from a general view of the drift of the work.

It is this which has most of all puzzled and divided interpreters. Dr. Ginsburg, in his elaborate Commentary, occupies more than two hundred full pages of his Introduction in reviewing the

exegesis of Koheleth, both Jewish and Christian, beginning with the Book of Wisdom—which he dates B.C. 217, and holds to have been in some sense a commentary on Ecclesiastes — down to 1860 A.D., the year before his own volume was published. The views propounded by this long line of commentators are as various as can well be conceived. They range from the exposition of the Midrash, which teaches that Solomon wrote the book to expose the emptiness of all worldly pursuits and show that the happiness of man consists in obeying the commandments of God, down to the views of those who hold that the view of life here propounded inclines to fatalism, scepticism, and epicureanism. The prevailing view among Jews and Christians for many centuries was that the book sets forth the repentance of Solomon after he had been led away by his foreign wives—and, as an old legend adds, deposed for three years in punishment for his sins. Luther in his "Table-talk" threw out the suggestion which seems to have expressed his real opinion, though he did not defend it in his published works, that Ecclesiastes was not written by Solomon or by any one man, but that it is a compilation, put together by Sirach in the time of the Maccabees. In modern times there has been a tendency to regard the general drift of the book

as a kind of pious epicureanism, counsels intended for troublous times, advocating present enjoyment in moderation and the fear of God as the only way of passing through a state which at best is full of disappointment and sorrow. If it be said that the phrase "pious epicureanism" implies a contradiction, it is just that element of apparent inconsistency which has troubled interpreters. Some—the older writers—emphasised the piety; the moderns dwell more upon the epicureanism. But it would not be difficult to gather a sheaf of opinions attributing the most opposite aims to the writer. While some hold that it is ascetic in tendency, others accuse it of favouring sensual gratification. Some say it was written to comfort the Jews in trouble, others that it embodies the moody reflections of a misanthrope. Some hold that its point may be expressed by the words, "All things work together for good to them that love God," others that it contains a serious indictment of the moral government of the world, and recognises no god but chance or fate; as Omar Khayyam expresses it—

> With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,
> And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
> And this was all the harvest that I reaped—
> I came like Water, and like Wind I go.

The views of the most recent commentators tend

to emphasise the eclectic character of the book, and the more advanced critics, as we have said, deal very freely with the text, getting rid of contradictions by supposing a sceptical original "worked over" by orthodox editors. Renan[1] very characteristically enjoys and praises the work as containing the only pages in the Old Testament marked by *sang-froid*. It is written, he holds, by a man of the world, a sceptic, a materialist, a fatalist, a pessimist, only not an atheist. He much prefers the tone of this mundane philosopher to that of the prophets who write in a fury, with their heads in the clouds; this wise man is content to shrug his shoulders over abuses and say to the would-be reformer, "No use!" Ewald, on the other hand, pictures the author as a pious Israelite, who pitied the calamities of his fellow-countrymen, and wished to lessen their sorrows by giving them sound advice for the trying times in which they lived. He recommends them to be patient and cautious, points out the dangers of rebellion and excess, and reminds them of the fact that God rules, that one day He will judge the whole earth, rectify all

[1] The view sketched in the following sentences is that of the chapter on Koheleth in the last volume of his *History of Israel*, posthumously published. These pages were amongst the last Renan ever wrote.

its abuses, and clear up all its perplexities; let them therefore quietly enjoy what of good their life affords, and prepare for old age and death, which comes to all in turn.

After listening to such various and irreconcilable interpretations, what are we to say? We have purposely refrained from anything like a broad survey of the history of exegesis, and the views of contemporary writers such as Ginsburg and Delitzsch, Cox and Cheyne, will be more conveniently discussed in the next chapter. But we have said enough to show the need of a very careful examination into the teaching of a book which has been so differently understood; enough to show the difficulties which beset its interpretation; enough, we would hope, to excite some interest in the question whether it is possible, taking the book as it stands, to find in it one sustained, consistent scope and purpose, in harmony with the general teaching of the Old Testament, and entitling so strange a composition to a place in the sacred Scriptures of the Christian Church.

CHAPTER XI.

ECCLESIASTES: ITS CONTENTS AND SCOPE.

IT is desirable as far as possible to examine every book of the Bible without prejudgment as to its form and character, allowing it as far as possible to speak for itself. But in no instance is this more necessary than in the one before us. All men, critics included, love to classify and measure by their own foot-rule. A book is apt to be judged by its readiness to fit into one or other of the pigeon-holes to which it is assumed it must belong. Job is said to be a drama, the Song of Songs an idyll, the Book of Proverbs a collection of maxims. Koheleth as it stands is perplexingly irregular: it is not a mere collection of maxims, but neither is it a treatise, nor a poem, nor a record of debate. The writer seems to pursue no settled plan, nor to observe any clearly traceable sequence of thought; the impatient critic of the present century proceeds therefore to trim it into shape, allotting this passage to

an editor, accounting others to be interpolations or transpositions, and the book, thus improved, is found to fit tolerably well into the pigeon-hole labelled "Pessimistic Philosophy," where it is allowed to rest. It is preferable to examine the book as it stands; its own irregularities and even inconsistencies may be more instructive than an artificially shaped product of modern ingenuity.

The book almost defies analysis, but some of its chief features may be shown in the following table:—

i. 1–11. PROLOGUE. The subject of the book opened up—the Vanity of Life.

i. 12–ii. 26. Narrative of the experiences of the "son of David." Vain pursuit of Wisdom and Pleasure.

iii. The ordinary routine and business of life: Disappointment and Fruitlessness the end of all.

iv. A further survey: the wrongs of the oppressed: the vicissitudes of man's lot.

v., vi. The same conclusions reached from a consideration of the Church, the State, possession of riches and length of days.

vii. A collection of proverbial sayings on kindred subjects.

viii. 1–ix. 10. A repetition of the same useless quest: human governments, Divine retribution, apparent lack of justice, the only course for the practical man.

ix. 11–x. 20. Proverbial philosophy concerning the conduct of life, national and individual.

xi. 1–xii. 8. Conclusions arrived at. Counsel to use and enjoy what is given, preparing for death and judgment.

xii. 8–14. EPILOGUE. Summary of the teaching of the Wise.

An attempt to follow out the above analysis will soon reveal the fact that after the end of the 2nd chapter arrangement of subjects becomes almost impossible, the same weary round being trodden over and over again. The writer keeps to the same topic only for a few verses at most, and the conclusions he arrives at are not like milestones upon a road that leads to a definite goal, they meet us as the same objects again and again strike the eye of the perplexed traveller who has lost his way in the forest and finds that hours of walking bring him no nearer to an exit. And even so, these conclusions are often not consistent with one another. The baffled philosopher does not even pursue a mill-horse round of monotonous moralising; or, if he does, he frequently varies the direction in which he treads it. Not till the close of the book, if then, does the goal appear to which all the observation and reflection of the writer is supposed to lead his readers. This it is necessary to say, lest the student be disappointed by the word "analysis." There is no ordered sequence of thought to analyse. On the other hand, the thoughts of the book are not without connexion. Roughly speaking, they all refer to one subject, and bear, directly or indirectly, on one theme. The opening chapters set it forth in what promises to be an orderly fashion. Soon,

however, and increasingly as the book proceeds, the writer seems to be recording "jottings," sometimes fragments of experience, sometimes the results of observation, sometimes gnomic sayings, sometimes practical counsels. These appear not only to have been written at different times, but to represent different moods. Koheleth does not stay to harmonize them, and appears unconscious of any need of comparison and reconciliation. I looked out upon the world, he says, and saw this and this, and came to such a conclusion. Again I reflected, "I returned and saw under the sun" that in human life things happen thus and thus, and note my observations accordingly. That all these notes should teach substantially the same doctrine, all point in one direction, is by no means necessary. "Mark this feature of life," says the melancholy sage; "this other also has come under my eye." In view of certain characteristics of the time, he adds, it will be well for the wise man to order his affairs thus and thus, and the exact relation of one piece of practical counsel to another, he does not stay to consider. Yet out of this confusion a measure of order grows, through it all a measure of unity appears. The words are many, the man is one. There is a prevailing tone of reflection, which gives a sense of dreary unity amounting to monotony. The impression is height-

ened by the fragmentary nature of the composition joined to the frequent repetition of the same thoughts. The effect is like that of the wearisome drip of separate drops of water in the same place, like repeated short blows iterated and reiterated, instead of one good, honest, straightforward assault. If Koheleth exhibits a lack of art, he does it in artistic fashion. One steadily pursued argument would produce nothing like the cumulative effect of his disjointed musings and moralisings. How far the last chapter helps us out of the maze of difficulty and disappointment trodden through the main portion of the book, we shall shortly inquire.

The prologue is most impressive. It is a melancholy theme for music—vanity, vanity, all is vanity, a pursuit of shadows, a feeding upon wind. But if such a mournful air is to be rendered, it could not be more movingly played over than in these opening bars. We have read of an Everlasting No and an Everlasting Yea; this strain neither presents us with the joy of triumphant solution nor the stimulus of an emphatic opposition, it pictures an everlasting Sameness, in which is neither enjoyment, nor meaning, nor issue—a land "where all things always are the same," and events are as fruitless as they are monotonous. The sun rises, sets, "pants" in its unceasing round, which

is only a round after all. The wind turns to the south, turns to the north, "goeth ever circling," and when it has circled, returns, and circles again. The rivers run to the sea, but nothing comes of it; the sea does not fill and overflow, but the water returns out of the clouds to the rivers again, and the same weary story is told again. All things are weary to the weary man. When man has been trying to satisfy his eye with seeing and his ear with hearing, he is likely to be weary, and whether he looks upon nature or on man, he will see the same dreary picture of endless effort followed by endless failure.

> Into this universe, and WHY not knowing,
> Nor WHENCE, like water willy-nilly flowing,
> And out of it, as wind along the waste,
> I know not WHITHER, willy-nilly blowing.

The strains that follow are indicated by this overture. Koheleth appears in the guise of that "king over Israel in Jerusalem" who had the best opportunity of proving how much enjoyment life can afford. Eminent alike for riches, for power, for fame, and for wisdom, if *he* drained the cup of life to its dregs and found it unsatisfying and saddening, it cannot be surprising if lesser men come to the same conclusion. The result of all the wise man's wisdom, his abstract knowledge, his study of the actual life of man upon the earth,

brought him only to this, that all is "vapour and feeding upon wind." Much wisdom means much sadness; to multiply knowledge is to multiply sorrow. Pleasure is no better; the wine of the banquet, the laughter of those who are feasting, failed alike to provide stimulus or satisfaction. He tries occupation, builds, plants, stocks his parks, and fills his palaces. He tries every resource of artistic enjoyment, the pomp and luxury of an elegantly appointed household, the charms of music, the attendance of fair slaves, enjoyments not coarse and degrading, but daintily adapted to delicate and refined tastes—and having tried it all, "behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was no profit under the sun."

So far there has been little difficulty in interpretation. But let the careful reader who has never studied Ecclesiastes read the first fifteen verses of the 3rd chapter, and without assistance of commentary try to express their general drift and meaning. He will find it no easy task. Let him then turn to half a dozen good commentaries and he will find probably half a dozen different explanations. Let him then ask himself what is the connexion of thought between the paragraph just examined and that which extends from ch. iii. 16–22, and he will have formed a fair idea of

some of the characteristic difficulties which beset the exegete. It is not our object to enter into details of interpretation, but an inquiry into the meaning of this passage may provide a clue to the understanding of many others. The abruptness with which the writer introduces his aphorisms concerning the seasonable time allotted to every kind of human action makes it difficult to see why such a string of apparent truisms should be rehearsed at length. Nor is the difficulty removed when we find it followed up by the old despairing question, *Cui bono?* What is the use of it all? "What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth?" Everything is beautiful in its own season; it does not need a very wise man to tell us that; but this commonplace utterance is followed by an oracular saying, capable of two very different renderings: "He hath set the world in their heart" (R.V.), or "He hath set eternity in their heart" (R.V. marg.), "yet so that man cannot find out the work God hath done from the beginning to the end." These are riddles capable of more than one answer, but Koheleth's meaning seems to be this. Leaving the life of pleasure and turning to the life of ordinary routine and business, the same fruitlessness and disappointment meet us. True, there is a recognised order in such a life: every duty

has its season, every time has its fitting occupation. God, who orders all, has indeed constituted such an order, and given to each object in creation, each event in life, a certain beauty and fitness of its own. But man is only pursuing a kind of automatic round; it is a clock-work regularity, with little variety, no interest, no purpose, no "profit." Law reigns; what is man the better for that? Also, God has so made man that he is not content with this dull routine. He has put Eternity,[1] a sense of the Infinite, into man's heart, which fills him with longings that he cannot satisfy, glimpses of knowledge which he cannot attain—

> Infinite passion, and the pain
> Of finite hearts that yearn.

Man cannot understand God's work throughout, let him try as he will; he must tread his round with little delight and less profit; the order abides, he cannot change it, add to it or take from it; it remains only that he should pursue the course that lies before him with such equanimity as he may, eating and drinking, waking and sleeping, enjoying such good from his labour as he best

[1] Throughout the Old Testament the word "*olam*" is used in this sense. The meaning "world" belongs to the later Hebrew. If this meaning is to be adopted here, it is a mark of very late date.

may, and leaving all the rest as beyond his reach and ken. Man is powerless, God is inscrutable, duty is mechanical, life is unsatisfying; what hath been is, and what is shall be. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!

The words fall like clods on a coffin. We shrink from a teacher who takes a death's head for a text, especially if he preaches a series of sermons from it. For Koheleth's sermons must be taken as they stand. We must be on our guard against reading into his words a "profitable" meaning which they do not actually contain. Because these chapters are "in the Bible," and because the name of God is from time to time piously used, it does not follow that edification may be drawn from every paragraph. Rabbis and Christian Fathers, alike shocked at what seemed the rank paganism of the moral that a man should "rejoice and do good," that is, be happy, that he should "eat and drink and enjoy the good of his labour," have discovered all kinds of devout meanings in the phrases—study the Law, partake of the holy Sacrament, occupy himself in good works, with many more such well-intentioned glosses. Such exegesis brings its own Nemesis, and drives critics to an opposite extreme of scepticism. As in the Book of Job, our wisdom is to take every part of the book as it has come to us,

neither omitting what seems inconsistent, nor reading between the lines a Christian or deeply religious meaning which the text does not contain.

Pursuing such a method throughout, we find Koheleth in the latter part of the 3rd chapter in dark and gloomy mood indeed. He looks at what is called the course of justice and finds everywhere injustice; instead of equity, iniquity, and his heart sinks within him (ver. 16). But the thought occurs, This is only for a time; God will judge by and by, and separate between righteous and wicked. Yet even this thought fails to bring comfort, for if God does this to prove men (ver. 18), that they may know that if left to themselves they are but like the beasts, how does that relieve the perplexity of the riddle? Man is indeed like the beast; "as the one dieth, so dieth the other," all go to one place; "dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return," is true of man and brute alike. The 21st verse has been differently interpreted, and the meaning depends on whether a certain particle is to be understood as an interrogative or as the definite article. The Massoretic punctuation, followed in our A.V., adopts the latter, apparently as furnishing a less sceptical meaning. But the best scholars render (with R.V. and all the older versions), "Who knoweth the spirit of man, whether it goeth up-

ward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goeth downward to the earth?" The question is indeed sceptical. It does not deny, but still less does it affirm, that there is a distinction between the "breath" of man and the breath of beasts. It is the very motto of the sceptic in all ages—*Quien sabe*, who knows? If God is sifting and proving men, His sieve is fine indeed, for there seems no distinction between man and beast, and the best thing any man can do is to enjoy himself while he may, for who knows what shall be after him?

Such is the strain to which this "Preacher" recurs again and again. He breaks off occasionally into moralising over life, but his pensive and perturbed spirit remains unlightened, uncheered. "Two are better than one" (iv. 9), but that is because in hard times men need to help one another and stand shoulder to shoulder. The poor are oppressed and judgment is perverted (v. 8); it is of no use to complain, appeal from court to court, from official to official; no good can come of it, all are bent on their own advantage, the highest in the kingdom not excepted. The day of death is better than the day of birth, the house of mourning than the house of feasting; better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof. Man is sinful (vii. 20), and woman is even worse (26–28); Providence may have ordered

well in the beginning, but the world as it is is full of man's evil devices, and a fruitlessness that baffles and mocks man's best endeavours throws a dark shadow over his life. Wisdom is excellent, but it is not successful; it is acknowledged that it is better than weapons of war (ix. 18), but one perverse fool may undo all the good which many wise men have endeavoured to establish.

If this were the whole teaching of Ecclesiastes, as it does undoubtedly convey the spirit of its larger portion, we might here lay down the pen. A man who has *only* this to say is neither a good Jew nor a good Theist; it may even be questioned whether he is a good man. Doubtless there are facts in life which bear out most of these utterances. A cynic has never yet lacked material for his unholy gibes in any country or any state of civilisation, and doubtless there was in Palestine in the third and fourth centuries before Christ only too much reason for a philosophy of despair. But the people among whose sacred writings Koheleth is found were distinguished amongst the nations for the "fear of God," and so far as we have at present noted, this religiousness of spirit has been conspicuous by its absence. A man who looks at human life only might thus speak; a man who believes in a God should have a different light to shed upon the same saddening and depressing scenes.

Accordingly, we do find another strain recurring at intervals. It is true the gracious covenant-name of Jehovah is not found in this book, but the name Elohim, which points to the Creator and Ruler of mankind, occurs thirty-seven times. Providence is recognised. All good gifts and the joys they bring are God's gift. That which He does is right. The very phrase in question, the "fear of God," occurs not once but thrice, and that in the earlier part of the book. God doeth this "that men should fear before Him" (iii. 14); "there are divers vanities among men, but fear thou God" (v. 7); "I know that it shall be well with them that fear God" (viii. 12). The critics who are anxious to clip this book into uniformity of teaching have proposed to delete several verses as interpolations, but they will be compelled to mutilate the text much further before they can banish the element of piety which is discernible even in the writer's darker moods. That Koheleth's is essentially a reverent, though a greatly desponding spirit, is plain from such passages as ch. v. 2, "God is in heaven and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few." "Our safest eloquence concerning Him is our silence," said Hooker; but not amongst the utterances of this apparently morbid philosopher should we have expected to find the original of that fine

saying. "God hath made man upright" (vii. 29). He must not be blamed for evil. The righteous, the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God (ix. 1); they are safe there. Man cannot find out His work, but it does not follow that He works not, and the recognition of that work is to be found in almost every chapter, in almost every dark and desponding train of reflection of this saddening book.

Thus far we have purposely refrained from making reference to the two last chapters. It is, of course, impossible to understand any book aright till it is finished; the whole explanation may be found in the last page. But before coming to that, we may pause for a moment to ask whether there is anything essentially incredible and impossible in the apparent inconsistencies of the earlier part of Ecclesiastes. We can hardly avail ourselves of the hypothesis that these chapters are to be understood like Tennyson's poem of the "Two Voices." Most of us know the sound of those diverse voices—the spirit which asserts and the spirit which denies, the voice which suggests doubts and difficulties and suspicions and fears, and the voice which silences these discordant notes in a burst of triumphant faith and hope. But in the modern poem the voices are sharply distinguished. The "dull and

bitter" tones cannot be confused with the "little whisper silver-clear" of the voice which "bade to be of better cheer." In Koheleth there is no such distinction, and the attempt to parcel out the contents of the chapters between two speakers fails utterly. The "I" is the same throughout, and in spite of St. James' question, we seem to find the same fountain pouring out sweet waters and bitter. Some allowance may be made for different moods. There are days for all of us when "our bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne," when the heart is elastic and hopeful, and all seems possible. There are days, again, when the clouds hang low and the sun is blotted out, and from the window, dim with our sighing and tears, little can be seen, and from that little no hope gathered. It seems quite legitimate to find in these chapters the scattered records of many moods, because the paragraphs themselves are so loose and disjointed in construction, and because a portion of the book is as clearly aphoristic in character as the Book of Proverbs. We do not expect all the "Thoughts" of Pascal or the maxims of Joubert to tally with one another like mathematical formulæ.

But this explanation by itself is not sufficient. We do not find the moods of Koheleth pointedly contrasted, as for example in the 77th Psalm,

where the psalmist pours out his sad questions and complaints, then turns round upon himself with an indignant "This is my infirmity. I will turn to better thoughts, and call to mind God's work in history and deeds of olden time." It is not here as in the Book of Job, where the sufferer first moans, then argues, then denies, and at last is brought to a better mind by the intervention of Jehovah. Throughout the writer is pious, but throughout—thus far—he is more or less desponding, more or less sceptical. We have not found inconsistency which amounts to violent and incredible self-contradiction, but we have found diverse tendencies in the same breast, a gloomy outlook upon life, however, prevailing for the most part over a very sincere but not very vital or vigorous faith in God. The tone of the whole picture thus far is low. Neutral tints prevail. In parts of it gloom overshadows all, and at best the light is neither clear nor dark. Such very "moderate" faith and devotion is at least half-sister to scepticism and despair.

What, then, is the drift of the closing chapters? It has been already shown, in discussing the integrity of the book, that it is possible to read the epilogue, ch. xii. 8–14 or 9–14, either as written by the author, or as added by a subsequent hand. There is nothing in the style or

contents of these closing verses to determine the question either way, except that one or two of the expressions would seem to come more appropriately from the pen of an annotator than from the original writer. The considerations which determine every critic in his view of the epilogue are probably derived from his view of the whole book. Without discussing alternative theories, therefore, we proceed to give the view of the closing verses which seems to us most probable and most in harmony with the book to which they form a close and a climax. If the text of Koheleth be allowed to stand as it is down to ch. xii. 7, it cannot be said that the epilogue really adds anything to the doctrine of the book. Professor Cheyne and others argue for the "excision" of ch. xii. 7, because "this no doubt is a direct contradiction of ch. iii. 21." Strangely enough, however, Dr. Cheyne adds: "The excision of these words would of course not be justified in a translation intended for popular use, but for the purposes of historical study seems almost inevitable." The morality or desirability of such a distinction seems very questionable. Even taking the darker and more sceptical meaning of which ch. iii. 21 is capable, it by no means follows that the same writer could not have written both passages. The earlier verse at worst expresses doubt and

ignorance, not denial; and surely no student of Old Testament language concerning the future life can wonder at finding a measure of inconsistency or hesitation upon this subject in the writings of the same author at different times, especially in a work of such loose construction as Koheleth. The language of ch. xii. 13, 14, concerning the judgment, harmonizes with the teaching of the latter part of ch. xi. 9, another passage which critics, anxious for consistency, are compelled to exscind.

If, then, there be no reason on the score of doctrine to attribute ch. xii. 9–14 to a later hand, neither need the form of the closing verses occasion insuperable difficulty, if they are supposed to proceed from the original author. This is only possible, however, on the supposition that the writer has used the name of the "son of David" for the purposes of his composition. Undoubtedly the change in person and tone obvious in the closing verses is too marked and unnatural, unless we understand that the writer of Ecclesiastes, having used his impersonation far enough, drops the mask and appears for a moment or two in his own person, commenting on the general drift of the utterances which he has put into the mouth of a certain "Preacher." The speaker is introduced in the third person in the prologue

(i. 1). He begins to speak in the first person at the opening of the main portion of the book (i. 12–xii. 7). Then in the close, for the first time, the definite article is used with the noun Koheleth, hitherto employed like a proper name, to indicate that the writer of the closing verses is discussing the utterances of *the* "Preacher" who has thus far been giving a series of addresses. This new Solomon has not spoken in a way altogether easy to understand, and the writer takes up his characteristic refrain in ch. xii. 8, and makes his own comments, summing up the whole in characteristic fashion in the last two verses of all.

If this be the correct account of the relation of the epilogue to the rest of the book, what is to be said of the teaching of the whole? The first thing that strikes us is the general similarity of strain perceptible throughout. Ch. xi. and xii. are not fundamentally different from the rest. The practical counsels to provide for the future, to use opportunities as they come and redeem the time, which mark the 11th chapter, are little more than an echo of the language of ch. v. 18–20 and ix. 10. What has been called the "agnosticism"—a misleading term—of earlier verses, *e.g.* ch. iii. 11 and viii. 17, reappears in ch. xi. 5. The limits of human knowledge which here give difficulty to Koheleth are only such as those which St. Paul

acknowledged when he said, "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." It is not the impossibility of apprehending the Divine existence of which the Preacher speaks, but the impossibility of comprehending all the order of His providence —quite another matter. The rational enjoyment of the present life which is enjoined in ch. xi. 9, reminds us of ch. v. 18 and ix. 7. The teaching concerning judgment which we find in the latter part of ch. xi. 9 and xii. 14, finds some parallel in ch. iii. 17 and viii. 12, 13. The language used concerning old age and death in the 12th chapter is quite in harmony with that of the 9th. If the fear of God is dwelt upon in ch. xii. 13, it is likewise the moral of ch. v. 7 and viii. 13.

There is, nevertheless, a difference observable in the closing section of the book which entitles us to regard it as giving the conclusion in which the writer ultimately rested. The moral teaching of the last chapters is more definite and pronounced than anything that has preceded. Before this, the Preacher, with almost exasperating iteration, has repeated his favourite formulæ after every separate experience. Even when for a time he has appeared to get a glimpse of higher truth, he has lost it again, pulling down the very structure of belief in Providence which he himself had reared. Now he speaks more pointedly. The young man

is indeed to rejoice in the days of his youth, and enjoy all of good that life brings with it,—words which we can never believe are to be understood ironically,—but he is so to pass the time of early vigour, as knowing that God will require account of all, and that he will be wise to "remember his Creator in the days of his youth." This last phrase, the critics who wish to "harmonize" the different parts of the book have been obliged to interpret in a fashion which, if it had been adopted by conservative theologians, we venture to think they would have been amongst the first to pronounce grammatically impossible and contextually absurd.[1] Another difference observable is the way in which the refrain "All is vanity" is treated. In ch. xi. 9 we read that youth and the prime of life are vanity, and in ch. xi. 8, "all that cometh is vanity," but these clearly are warnings not to build on strength or length of days upon earth, in view of death which overshadows every life. The old strain in which hopelessness darkens all, and *everything* is subject to vanity and purposelessness, does not recur in these last chapters. Of course, if the exclamation in ch. xii. 8 be supposed to come from Koheleth, this point cannot be made good. But there are several reasons for following the old Massoretic punctua-

[1] "Bethink thee of thy fountain," that is, thy wife!

tion and making the epilogue to begin with ch. xii. 8. It is more natural to suppose that in this verse the writer of the book takes up the saying which the Preacher has repeated so often, quoting it as the keynote of the body of the book, and giving to it a characteristic turn and application. It is not likely that one who has hitherto spoken of himself in the first person, and without the article, should here place himself outside himself, whilst repeating once more his customary formula. The 8th verse should then be printed in inverted commas and connected closely with the phrase of ver. 9, in which the writer shows the relation of the "Book of Wisdom," just concluded in ch. xii. 7, with other "words of the wise," which he fully characterises, then adds his own practical conclusion.

On this supposition the book forms one whole, and no serious inconsistency in doctrine is observable in it, unless it be thought that the teaching of ch. xii. 7, "The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return unto God who gave it," contains too explicit and definite a belief in a future life to find a place in a book of so prevailingly gloomy a cast. On this subject a few remarks are necessary. First it must be said that the language is not very definite. It has been understood by many as not implying separate

personal existence after death; and though we think it undoubtedly does imply a future life for the human spirit, it does not speak in a tone anything like as clear and assured as, for instance, Dan. xii. 2. But secondly, assuming that in this verse there is a clear declaration of faith, it cannot be said that the man who wrote "Who knoweth the spirit of man whether it goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goeth downward to the earth?" at one time in his life, could not write "The spirit returneth unto God who gave it" at another. If the book be, as we have seen, the record of moods, and quite apart from this particular subject, exhibits views of life varying with the writer's hopes and fears, inquiries and disappointments, such diversity is only what we might expect. Such variation might occur in the moods of a Christian, has probably occurred in the fitful experiences of tens of thousands. But we are not examining the writings of a man upon whom New Testament light has dawned. No clear revelation has been made concerning a future life, and as in the Psalms, so elsewhere in the Old Testament, the tone in which death and that which lies beyond the grave are spoken of varies from time to time, like the lights and shadows that chase one another across the hills upon an April day of sunshine and showers. If

we find a measure of variation in this book, doubt passing into assurance, scepticism into faith, need we be surprised?

It remains, however, when all is said, that the doctrine of a future life does not dominate this book, and is not pressed as the solution of its many problems. Apparently the soul of the writer tended, at least in his better moments, to rest in this issue of man's present perplexities, but this is only a gleam of light which shines in upon his darkness. It does not stay. His moral is not, Prepare for a better life, but, Make the best use of the present. That God will judge, the writer seems well assured; but probably, if pressed, he would have acknowledged, as Job did, that he knew not when, or how. A *Goel* or Vindicator would arise; every work and every hidden thing should be brought into the light, its good or evil character shall be made plain, and judgment pronounced accordingly. But Koheleth could not say how this was to be done. Sometimes he had hoped to see it with his own eyes, but again and again he had been disappointed. Beyond the dark cloud-wrack which obscured for him the close of human life he could not see, but he rested in this, that to fear God and keep His commandments was the one thing for man; his whole duty, his only safety. If the writer himself did not

pen the last two verses of the book, and even if we do not insist upon the apparently explicit teaching that the spirit after death should return to its Maker God, we might still without unfairness say, "This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard." Koheleth has spoken in many tones, sad and hopeful, wise and scornful, stimulating and despairing, but this is his last and prevailing word. For the son of David in Proverbs the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, for the son of David who speaks in Ecclesiastes the light is not so clear and hope is often well-nigh extinct, but he ends where he began, and the last word of wisdom is the same as the first.

It is only after careful study of the whole book that we become assured of this. The tone changes so often that it is difficult to know when we hear the voice of the real man. There is much ground for the complaints of inconsistency so freely made against Koheleth. Down to the very last we are left in doubt whether the Preacher has risen above his "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." If pleasure is a striving after wind, and one event happeneth to the wise man and the fool, the righteous and the wicked, if oppressors multiply and no comforter be anywhere found, if riches avail nothing and length of days bring no relief, if all man's searching cannot enable him

to understand the ways of Providence, and all the joys of youth lead but to the pitiable infirmities of age and then to the grave, in which is "no work, nor desire, nor knowledge, nor wisdom," life is but a dreary farce, a "tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." True, in the background there remains a hope, sometimes strengthening into faith, sometimes quite vanishing away, that God will judge all in His own good time, but it remains in the background only. God is, that is certain; He ought therefore to be feared and obeyed at all costs. But as to enjoyment, let a man get what he can, in moderation and under the allotted conditions of life, for there is enough around to depress the most sanguine, and little to be said concerning the future. The highest flight of all which the book contains soars but little above the earth, and the main course of its argument cleaves to the very dust.

It is only after we have recognised and admitted all this, that we perceive the essential piety of the writer underlying the whole. It answers no good end to deny tolerably obvious facts, to explain away the natural meaning of texts, or to argue that because Ecclesiastes is "in the Bible," it cannot be sceptical in its tendency. The question is, What does Koheleth say? not what do we think it would have been edifying for him

to say. And—especially if we understand the book to close with ch. xii. 8, and the epilogue to be written by a later hand—the level of the religious teaching which the book contains must be admitted to be low indeed. But it is religious. The author is no atheist, no agnostic in the modern sense, no fatalist, no pessimist. He takes for the most part a gloomy view of life, but the darkness is never quite unrelieved, and sometimes he reaches a modest cheerfulness. He can fear God himself and urge similar piety on others, in spite of there being so much in the ways of Providence which he cannot understand, and which sometimes drives him to utter despondency. He can give good counsel for "the present distress," though he has none of the outlook of the seer upon a sunlit and steadily brightening future.

If this seem to be a tone unworthy of a book that took its place among Jewish Holy Scriptures and now occupies a place in the Christian's Bible, there are several things to be said in arrest of such judgment. And first we might ask, What else was given to a godly Jew living (say) in the third century before Christ to say upon these great and difficult questions? Koheleth lived in the midst of perplexities, on which he reflected with an insight by no means usual, and—what is still more unusual—he recorded his reflections with

complete candour. His lot was cast upon a time of anarchy, or of misgovernment which was almost worse than no government at all. He had opportunities of judging of the attractions of various pursuits and modes of life; he tried them, and found them wanting. The pleasures and business of the world he found alike hollow, when tried by the searching test of their ability to satisfy a human soul. He compared men's characters and the conditions of life in which they are severally found, and while there appeared to him to be many indications that man upon earth is placed under the moral government of a righteous God, he failed to find an adequate correspondence between condition and character, and despaired of ever finding such upon earth. No clear revelation of a future life had been made to him. He did not deny its reality; nay, at times he was convinced of it. But he had no sufficient grounds to enable him dogmatically to announce it, or to silence the doubts and questionings of his anxious heart. When the Christian poet is impelled by the losses and perplexities of earthly life to utter cries similar to those of Koheleth, he has but one answer—

> O life as futile, then, as frail!
> What hope of answer, or redress?
> Behind the veil, behind the veil.

But the veil had not yet been withdrawn in the measure to which He has withdrawn it, who has passed beyond it as our Forerunner, and enabled us to cast the anchor of a sure hope within the precincts it hides. Koheleth did not possess, any more than the writers of the 49th and 88th Psalms, the clue to the maze all alike had to tread. Many of the psalmists were similarly exercised, and they found relief sometimes in the moral purity and worth of the Law, sometimes in the recollection of God's dealings with Israel in the past, sometimes in the character of God Himself. Sometimes again, as in the 37th Psalm, the poet can only reiterate, Wait, wait; and when thou hast waited, wait. But the psalmists' replies to their own darker thoughts and fears are not reasoned arguments, they are more or less sublime reaches of faith. Koheleth represents another temperament. He avers, like an earlier Thomas, "Except I shall put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe." He affirms, like Job, "It is all one; therefore I say, He destroyeth the perfect and the wicked." But he does not, like Job, hear the voice of the Almighty and so see His pure and awful Face as to cry, "Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Still less does he, like Thomas, surpass in the later faith, which he slowly and cautiously reaches, all

the attainments of his fellow-disciples, and cry, "My Lord and my God!"

But the Preacher does retain a very real and very valuable measure of faith, and he is not to be classed with mockers who were to come in the last days, scoffing and walking after their own lusts. As Delitzsch says, the Book of Ecclesiastes is not as Heine calls it, the Song of Scepticism, but the Song of the Fear of God. Only it does not really possess the characteristics of a song. The writer could not rise high enough above his troubles to sing. He barely holds his head above water, and needs all his breath to retain what faith remained to him. It is in this that he differs from, for example, the writer of the 73rd Psalm. No one yet called the writer of that beautiful lyric a sceptic, for he passed through the dark clouds of doubt and fear, soared above them, and broke forth into a song like the lark's, brighter and sweeter as he nears the skies. It is well that in the Bible we have examples of such trial and triumph. It is well also that we have a reflection of the heart-searchings of a sadder temperament, less easy to convince, less easy to satisfy, because unwilling to essay a flight of faith, insisting that the firm ground of experience shall be always under his feet. Men of such temperament have for the most part a hard time of it in the life of religion.

But their task would be harder did the Bible present us with no Job, no Thomas, no despondent Elijah, no sad-hearted Koheleth. Human moods of all kinds are reflected in the wonderful mirror of the Scriptures; and amongst them, that which it is perhaps hardest of all to bring under the yoke of devout and lowly service, the hard, bitter, ironical mood of a man who is far on his way towards despair. But that such a disease can find its appropriate medicine in the Bible is largely due to the fact that Ecclesiastes is included in the Canon.

It is not asserted that the book supplies a sufficient balm for its own pain. It is enough that it does not create pain, but faithfully reflects that which many feel, that it supplies a measure of relief according to the measure of revelation vouchsafed, and that it points to the need of further light and help. This last feature is important. It was the function of the Old Covenant to point forwards. Law, Prophets, Psalms, all bear witness to their own temporary and preparatory function. All awake stronger cravings than they can satisfy. None of them "made perfect as pertaining to the conscience," all foreshadowed the "bringing in of a better hope." If Ecclesiastes gives louder and clearer voice to the longing, if it proclaims in sharper and more uncompromising tones a human sense

of dissatisfaction with "the world" and its insufficiency to answer the questions or slake the spiritual thirst of humanity, shall it be denied its place and function in the history of revelation? It is not a product of the spirit "that ever denies," but it shows where and how the cry of humanity for spiritual satisfaction meets with no answer but the sound of its own wailing. It exhibits the picture of those of whom it is true that God "hath put eternity in their heart," trying to fill that vast capacity with the world, and failing. It suggests the tremendous question, "What is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world and lose *himself*?" If it has done nothing besides this, and has written its trenchant preliminary lesson, as it has done, upon the conscience and imagination of a world, Koheleth has not found its place in vain within the limits of a Jewish and a Christian Bible.

But there is more to be said than this. It is a distinct feature in the universal character of the Bible that it finds a place for the questionings of the sceptical and despondent, and by anticipation answers them. It must not be assumed, however, that the body of Ecclesiastes is composed of moody vapourings. The book reflects accurately enough a large number of undeniable facts in man's present condition. The fruit of the tree of knowledge is hard and bitter at its core. The

irony of history is no mere fancy of a misanthrope. Man's life on earth is not precisely a vale of tears, but it is not a child's holiday, nor an easy realisation of a youth's fond dream. "To think, is to be full of sorrow." A man of gloomy temperament colours the windows out of which he looks upon the landscape with sombre hues of his own imposing, but the majority of men, women, and children never study the landscape at all. He who looks at life ever so sanely and steadily, if he fairly looks it in the face, must turn away with a sigh, often with a shudder. It is a dark picture, in spite of the loveliness of nature's summer moods and the indestructible beauty and power of human affection. Heine pictures the youth on the seashore, vainly questioning waves and winds and clouds concerning the age-long riddle of life, and comes to the conclusion that "only a fool waits for an answer." If we as Christians believe that an answer is to be reached by the truly wise, that does not lessen the terrible perplexities of the riddle. Koheleth faces them, more fully, more candidly, more completely determined to meet them face to face, than most men, and this is a service for which humanity is indebted to him. It is not everyone's business to deal with these stern questions, but those who "pore into the madden-

ing riddle of the Root" could hardly be satisfied with a sacred Book which put all such anxious heart-searchings on one side with a smile.

Ecclesiastes does not encourage Pessimism. It is not really akin to Buddhism, but opposed to some of its fundamental tenets. Buddhism regards individual existence as an evil—a radical lie which Koheleth contradicts on every page. Pessimism regards the world as becoming steadily worse, and bound to reach the worst at last. It may be reasoned or un-reasoned. As elaborated into a system,[1] it is Atheistic or Pantheistic, and falls back upon an Unconscious or Unintelligent Ground of the universe. Koheleth on the other hand writes, "There are dreams and vanities, but fear thou God." For the most part Pessimism is not reasoned, but felt. It cries out in pain and terror, and such cries are not to be too rigorously analysed or too rigidly interpreted. It becomes poetical in its wrath; indignation drives a man to verse, as Horace said long ago. A Byron bears through Europe "the pageant of his bleeding heart," a Leopardi unburdens his soul in sighs; a James Thomson pens *The City of Dreadful Night.* But self-conscious poets who

[1] By Schopenhauer and Von Hartmann. It is noteworthy that Pessimism hardly dared thus to justify its existence in philosophy till a century ago.

pour out their souls with one eye on themselves and the other on an admiring public, know little of the real difficulties of life, and still less of the way in which to meet them. The misery of human life is a starting-point from which men may travel in many directions; and not those who start from the same premisses, but those who reach similar conclusions, are to be classed together. The Book of Ecclesiastes as a whole does not teach that "All is vanity and feeding upon wind"; and even where that melancholy conclusion is reached, the reader must be careful to understand from the context what the "all" in question includes.

A Christian, however, regards his Bible as an organic whole, and is not careful to insist upon the completeness of the teaching of its parts taken severally. His view of the Bible prevents him, or should prevent him, from resting upon the teaching of "texts," or even of books viewed singly and apart. The Christian is not concerned to prove that Koheleth had solved satisfactorily, even for the times in which he lived, the problems which he unfolds with so much vividness and power. A sound interpretation of the book must, as we think, admit that while difficulties abound upon the surface of the book, some answers to them may be found by patient study, and only a

superficial reader or an unscrupulous critic who tampers with the text can come to the conclusion that the writer was a pessimist, an epicurean, or a worldly philosopher marked by *sang-froid* such as Renan saw and loved in him. But the highest conclusions to be found in Koheleth are only the lowest rounds of the ladder on which the Christian climbs upward. The Preacher pursues his quest amidst repeated disappointment, the gospel kindles and sustains an inextinguishable hope. The Preacher groans over evil in the ascendant, Christ brings deliverance from it. The Preacher beholds misery here, and dimly hopes that the balance may be redressed hereafter; but "life and immortality are brought to light through the gospel." The Preacher describes a need such as the prodigal felt when he came to himself in the far country, his money spent, his body hungry, and his soul sore with vain regret and longing; but when Wisdom Incarnate spoke, He described also the satisfaction of the need to be found in a Father's home and a Father's heart.

There is no need to point at length the contrast between Ecclesiastes and Christ's gospel. There is perhaps some need to insist on the fact that the appearance of the new Evangel has not made void or useless the Wisdom-Literature of an earlier age. It did its work in its own time, and

it has work to do still. There are times in a man's history when he is not ready to sit at the feet of Jesus, and when it is better for him to go to school to Koheleth. The heart must be emptied before it can be truly filled. The modern preacher has often to enforce the lesson, not yet obsolete, nor ever to become obsolete, "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." He must come to Christ to learn how to do this effectively, and to be taught those higher lessons for which this does but prepare the way. But Wisdom is justified of all her children, and he who follows with toil of heart and knees and hands the wise man of old time in his quest of the chief good will find it in the service of Him who came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SONG OF SONGS.

THE book we are now about to examine has been pronounced the enigma of the Old Testament, as the Apocalypse is the enigma of the New. A riddle the Song of Songs certainly is, though not for the same reasons which make the Apocalypse so difficult to understand. Some eminent commentators have even held that it is intentionally enigmatic, and that it has come down to us as one of those "dark sayings" in which Solomon especially delighted.[1] In any case, the book has alternately delighted and perplexed both the Jewish and the Christian Churches, and to-day devout readers are troubled how to gain spiritual profit from a book which they

[1] So Godet, who considers that it closes with "four enigmas in regular form," that of the apple-tree (viii. 5), the little sister (viii. 8), the two vineyards (viii. 11), and the flight of the beloved (viii. 14.) See his *Old Testament Studies*, p. 257, etc.

yet hesitate to pass by. The difficulties arise partly from its form, partly from its substance. As to its form, even when taken in the greatly improved and much more intelligible rendering of the Revised Version, a careful reader who has no commentary is bewildered by the rapid change of speakers and an apparent lack of coherence in the dialogue, if it be dialogue, which is maintained. Here and there, too, occur passages which in any translation appear hopelessly obscure. The subject-matter presents even more serious difficulties, supposing all the obvious ones of outline and connexion to be surmounted. The book appears to be concerned with human loves, with the details of marrying and giving in marriage, the transports of the betrothed and the joys of idyllic affection. It seems almost as hard to believe that a sacred book, forming part of God's word to man, should be concerned merely with such matters, as to suppose that without the slightest indication to that effect, words which appear to refer to the loves of man and maiden are to be understood of high spiritual verities, the devotion of Israel to Jehovah, or that love of Christ to His Church which is the supreme consummation of all that man has ever known or dreamed of in the region of sublime and self-sacrificing devotion. Yet there are so obviously

to be found in it passages of surpassing beauty and attractiveness, and some of its expressions have had for Christians of all ages such high and holy associations, that it seems tantalising and wrong to neglect or pass over it. Will not this "garden enclosed and fountain sealed" yield up its secret and disclose its beauty, if reverent hands try to turn the key in the lock which prevents access to its treasures?

The title of the book is almost certainly of later date than the book itself, and is probably to be ranked (*e.g.*) with the title at the beginning of Isaiah's prophecies, in ch. i. 1, ii. 1, xiii. 1, etc. The meaning of the phrase *Shir ha-shirim*, Song of Songs, unquestionably is "The song which is loveliest of all." The Hebrew idiom hardly requires explanation, and is most familiar to us in the name "Holy of holies." The book is attributed to Solomon in some sense. It is probable, though not certain, that the editor who prefixed the title considered Solomon to be the author of the book. The mention of Solomon's name in ch. viii. 11, 12, would be sufficient to warrant the title "to or for Solomon"; but there can be no question that the tradition of centuries has ascribed the authorship to Solomon, in the same way that psalms with a similar prefix have been ascribed to David or Solomon respectively.

Whether Solomon could have been its author or no, depends somewhat upon the interpretation given to the poem.

Any difficulty of interpretation that may have been felt by Jew or Christian has done nothing to interfere with its reception into the sacred Canon. Rabbi Akiba, writing in the first century A.D., says: "No Israelite has ever disputed the canonicity of the Song of Songs. No day in the whole history of the world is of so much worth as the one in which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is most holy."[1] It was translated into Greek by Aquila, probably during the first century of our era, and again before the end of the second century. It is contained in the catalogue of sacred books found in the Talmud, and has long been read in Jewish synagogues annually on the Feast of the Passover. It was, of course, a part of the sacred Scriptures, recognised as such by our Lord and His apostles, though we do not know that the book was ever quoted by any of them, nor does there appear to be any distinct reference to any part of it in the New Testament. It comes down to us, therefore, as part of a sacred deposit, nor must any modern views of its character and design be allowed to

[1] *Mishna Yadaim*, iii. 5.

deprive it of the place which its history as a sacredly cherished document entitles it to receive.

At the same time, searching inquiry into its character is necessary. The most sacred traditions are the better, not the worse, for such examination, if only it be reverently and properly conducted. No intelligent appreciation of the sacredness of any book can be ours so long as we do not understand it. And the history of the interpretation of the Song compels us to examination and decision of some kind for ourselves. Two modes of understanding the book are possible — the literal, and the allegorical or spiritual. If the former of these two be adopted, then again two chief modes of interpretation hold the field amongst scholars. Thus, three in all will claim our attention, each seeking to do justice to the place of the book in the Canon of Scripture, but reaching the end by very different paths.

1. The traditional line of interpretation for centuries in the Jewish, and subsequently in the Christian Church was the allegorical, mystical, or spiritual. It is adopted in the running tables of contents prefixed to the chapters in the Authorised Version, and the subject of the whole book according to this exegesis may be described in the words prefixed to the 2nd chapter,

"The mutual love of Christ and His Church." Perhaps the best modern exponent of it that can be found is Bishop Wordsworth, who speaks for a long line of ecclesiastical expositors when he says: "All these unite in teaching that the Song of Solomon is not to be interpreted literally. All the ancient Christian expositors agree in the opinion that the Song of Solomon represents the pure love and mystical union and marriage of Christ and His Church. They teach us to see in this Divine book of Holy Scripture a prophetical representation of Christ's Incarnation, of His Preaching, of His Passion, when He purchased His Bride with His own blood, of His glorious Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, of the sending of the Holy Ghost, of the propagation of the gospel, the call of the Gentiles, and the future conversion of the Jews."[1] According to this mode of dealing with the text, the opening words of the poem, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," are, without the slightest introduction or explanation, to be understood as uttered either by the Church of God longing for the Incarnation, when God should meet man in lowly condescension, embracing and taking upon Himself our nature, or by the Church of Christ longing for union and communion with the Saviour who

[1] Introduction to "Song," p. 123.

loved the Church and gave Himself for it. According to this method, the words in the 3rd chapter, in which the maiden describes her search for her beloved and bringing him to her mother's house, describe the longing of the Church for the conversion of the Jews; her vain appeal to the "watchmen," the unfaithful priests and Levites who could give no help towards finding Christ; and the coming of the beloved to the mother's house signifies the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the longing of the Church for the conversion of the Jews. "I charge you that ye wake not my love till he please," means that this "evangelisation of Israel will demand much patient faith and waiting on the Church's part"! The description of the prince's daughter in ch. vii. is supposed to represent the beauty of the Church in her missionary work.

The arguments in favour of this mode of interpretation—if we were to illustrate it in detail it might seem almost too extravagant for belief—seem to resolve themselves into the statement that the literal interpretation is too low and unworthy for the book to deserve a place in the sacred Scriptures. Wordsworth says: "We must accept this spiritual interpretation of the Canticles if we would not degrade it into an amatory ballad and voluptuous ditty, and distort it into a strange

and chimerical portraiture of unnatural and portentous monstrosities, unworthy of the Divine Author of Holy Writ." We need not stay to point out that the "strange and chimerical portraiture" lies rather with those who seek to make words mean something so exceedingly different from their usual acceptation, without the slightest indication in the book itself that any other than the ordinary meaning is intended. It is to be remembered, also, that this same line of argument has been applied in earlier generations, from Philo onwards to the narratives of the Pentateuch and other parts of Scripture, the literal interpretation of which appeared to the whole Alexandrian school of exegesis "carnal" and "unworthy of Holy Scripture." Origen argued at length that Jews and heretics could not be converted by the literal sense, that the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life, therefore the story of Rebekah going to draw water and meeting the servant of Abraham cannot mean anything so commonplace as appears upon the surface, but teaches us that we must come daily to the wells of Scripture in order to meet Christ. Bishop Wordsworth argues that the literal meaning of Canticles will "give countenance to carnal sensuality," just as Clement, Origen, Augustine, and others argued with regard to Genesis. They held that it would

occasion many evils if men were permitted to remain satisfied with the literal and obvious meaning of Scripture.

Piety of motive, however, can never justify false and misleading methods of teaching. The so-called "spiritual" mode of using Scripture which long prevailed in the Christian Church was the parent of many evils of which the excellent men who practised it and those who now would revive it seem hardly to have dreamed. It can only bring contempt upon Scripture to treat it by an exegetical method according to which words might be made to mean almost anything. If in a Hebrew document, written (say) a thousand years before Christ, which gives not the slightest indication of its being prophetic or of suggesting any ulterior meaning, the words, "Come, my beloved, let us go into the field, let us lodge in the villages," can be understood to mean that a community which did not come into existence till centuries afterwards, invites "Christ," whose name would not then be intelligible, to "assist her in preaching the gospel to the heathen in wild lands and to the inhabitants of rural villages, as well as populous towns and cities," then indeed the science of exegesis is reduced to absurdity, and any words may be made to convey

almost any meaning that the interpreter chooses to read into them.

The allegorical method has indeed long been abandoned by sober students of Scripture. It would have been unnecessary to linger even so long upon this matter, but that the Song of Songs forms the last refuge of those who cling to this method, and there are some reasons why it naturally dies harder here than elsewhere. The religious feeling of many good persons is so bound up with this traditional interpretation that one may well be loth to disturb or shock it. And, as has been said, a literal understanding of the words of the Song seems at first sight to furnish so little for edification, that the devout reader shrinks from what is at the same time a novel and an unwelcome series of associations. The only sound maxim, however, in reading the Bible, is to find out at all costs the primary, obvious, natural meaning of the words as penned by the original writer. If there be any considerations which modify this original meaning, they may be taken account of subsequently. It is easy to ascertain, for example, how far the laws which govern the use of figurative language apply in a particular case. It is not difficult to discern in some cases that a deeper and more far-reaching application of the words than that which lies

upon the surface is justifiable, or even necessary. But to set aside the primary and obvious meaning, without warrant in the document itself, for an interpretation remote and recondite, in order to make the passage "minister to edification," is dangerous in the extreme. The plain meaning once clearly ascertained, we may rest assured that edification will not be far off. This principle is now almost universally conceded, except in the case of the Song of Songs. It will not be difficult to show that in this case also, the sound principles of exegesis being followed, the book fits easily and beautifully into its place in the literature of the Old Covenant, and contains teaching which can never become obsolete.

2. Admitting, however, the literal as the primary meaning of the poem, it is yet possible to maintain that it has an ideal and typical significance. The well-known commentator, Delitzsch, may serve as perhaps the best representative of those who take this view. According to him, the Song is, as it appears at first sight, a love-poem. The maiden who figures so largely in it is not the daughter of Pharaoh, but "a country maiden of humble rank, who by her beauty and by the purity of her soul filled Solomon with a love for her which drew him away from the wantonness of polygamy, and made for him the primitive idea of marriage, as it is

described in Gen. ii. 24, a self-experienced reality. This experience he here sings, idealising it after the manner of a poet; *i.e.*, removing the husk of that which is accidental, he goes back to its kernel and its essential nature. We have before us six dramatic figures, each in two divisions, which represent from within the growth of this delightful relation to its conclusion. . . . The Song represents paradisaical, but yet only natural love. It stands, however, in the Canon of the Church, because Solomon is a type of Him of whom it can be said, 'a greater than Solomon is here.' Referred to Him the antitype, the earthly contents receive a heavenly import and glorification. We see therein the mystery of the love of Christ and His Church shadowed forth, not, however, allegorically, but typically."[1] It will be seen that this mode of applying the words to the Church of Christ differs materially from that before described. It violates no rule of exegesis, and if it can be maintained, reconciles the obvious meaning of the words with that deeper meaning which spiritually-minded readers have delighted to find in them.

According to this view, the outline of the poem is somewhat as follows. The Shulamite (vi. 13) is a country maiden from the north of Palestine,

[1] Introduction to Commentary (T. & T. Clark), p. 3.

who has been raised by Solomon to the rank of queen. She is a stranger among the daughters of Jerusalem, in appearance, in habits, and in her thoughts and feelings. The development of the little drama is very slight, the only progress in it being that by which the simple country girl teaches the wise man the superior joys of wedded love in its purity, weaning him from the luxury and indulgence of court-life as enjoyed by Oriental monarchs, to the delights of the pure affection of one husband for one wife. A number of graceful pictures succeed one another, all heightening the effect of the climax when it is reached, and helping to set forth the value and Divine significance of marriage as a holy bond uniting two souls together, who pass readily enough from thoughts of earthly to thoughts of heavenly love. The transition from this train of thought to the level on which St. Paul describes marriage as a mystery, a pattern of the relation between Christ and His Church, is easy and natural. The poem, as thus interpreted, divides itself into six parts: (1) The Anticipation, i. 2–ii. 7; (2) The Awaiting, ii. 8–iii. 5; (3) The Espousal and its Results, iii. 6–v. 1; (4) The Absence, v. 2–8; (5) The Presence, v. 9–viii. 4; (6) Love's Triumph, viii. 5–12; and a Conclusion, viii. 13, 14. The scene is laid partly in Jerusalem, partly in Solomon's park, partly at the

Shulamite's home in the country. The persons who speak in this lyrical drama are the Shulamite maiden, Solomon the king, and the daughters of Jerusalem who serve as chorus. "In the first half of the dramatic pictures, Shulamith rises to an equality with Solomon; in the second half, Solomon descends to an equality with Shulamith. At the close of the first, Shulamith is at home in the king's palace; at the close of the second, Solomon is at home with her in her Galilean home."

3. It has been increasingly felt, however, for the last half-century, among the majority of scholars, that the difficulties in the way of this hypothesis are insuperable. That Solomon should appear alternately as a stately king and as a simple shepherd, and that he should be found abandoning his court for a country cottage, appears on the face of it improbable; while a closer examination of the structure of the poem reveals the fact that it is not as simple as the above theory would make it. The view which Ewald was the first to work out, and which has been adopted since his time by Ginsburg and others, though with many subordinate modifications,[1] may be described as follows.

[1] Oettli, in the *Kurz-gefasstes Kommentar*, works out a more elaborate hypothesis of his own, which is very interesting, but makes, as we think, the dialogue too complicated.

The poem is a pastoral drama, in which the action is represented by a number of lyrical monologues, with occasional dialogue of the very simplest form. The persons are Shulamith, the maiden-heroine; her shepherd-betrothed, whose home, like hers, is in North Palestine; Solomon the king, the ladies of his court, the Shulamite's brothers, certain citizens of Jerusalem, and perhaps one or two minor interlocutors. The scene opens in Jerusalem, where the Shulamite is detained against her will by Solomon, who desires to take her as his bride among the many ladies of the royal household. She, however, is full of the thought of her shepherd-lover, to whom, in spite of all the attractions held out to her, she continues faithful. The poem describes, in by no means regularly sustained fashion, the admiration of Solomon, the devotion of the Shulamite to her absent betrothed, her dreams of the past and her home among the Northern hills, the unsuccessful attempts made to excite her ambition and induce her to assume queenly rank, closing by a description of her return to her parental home, her reunion with her shepherd-lover, and the triumph of pure and loyal natural affection. More in detail, the scheme would be as follows:—

PART I. i. 2–ii. 7.

1. The Shulamite and the ladies of the court in conversation; they fail to understand her longing for her absent friend.—i. 2–8.
2. Solomon seeks to win the Shulamite's love. Her thoughts are elsewhere; she begs that there may be no attempt to excite and transfer her affections.—i. 9–ii. 7.

PART II. ii. 8–iii. 5.

1. Reminiscences of scenes from the past life of the Shulamite, when she was happy with her beloved in her Northern home. She hopes that their separation may speedily end.—ii. 8–17.
2. A dream, in which the Shulamite seems to go in search of her lover.—iii. 1–5.

PART III. iii. 6–v. 8.

1. Citizens of Jerusalem describe the royal pageant which is seen approaching; Solomon in his palanquin, with his crown of state.—iii. 6–11.
2. Solomon seeks again to win the Shulamite's love, and praises her beauty.—iv. 1–7.
3. The Shulamite and her lover in real or ideal interview.—iv. 8–v. 1.
4. A second dream, in which the maiden seeks her beloved in vain throughout the city.—v. 2–8.

PART IV. v. 9–viii. 4.

1. Ladies in conversation with the Shulamite concerning her shepherd-lover.—v. 9–vi. 3.
2. The king enters, and seeks again to win the maiden's affection; but with less success than ever, as she declares her unswerving love for the absent one, and desire to be with him once more.—vi. 4–viii. 4.

PART V. viii. 5–14.

The Shulamite approaches, leaning on her lover's arm. She recounts her history, her brother's care for her welfare, her own purity and constancy; and the poem closes with a brief song expressive of the happiness of the pair reunited in their home among the hills.—viii. 5–14.

This may be described as the generally prevailing modern view of the poem. Some of the chief arguments which have led to its adoption in preference to the simpler and perhaps more spiritual interpretation previously described are these. First, the difficulty of supposing that Solomon could fill the various parts implied in such a hypothesis; appearing first as a shepherd in a country home, then as king in his palace, then returning again to the simplicity of country life and remaining in it. Secondly, the unlikelihood that a self-respecting maiden, with the feelings of pure affection expressed in the poem, could consent to be one in a royal harem consisting of many queens and concubines, as described in ch. vi. 8. Thirdly, the difference in language and tone observable in the addresses both of Solomon to the Shulamite, and of the Shulamite to her beloved, make it difficult, if not impossible, to suppose that only two persons are concerned in them. One supposition introduced to relieve this difficulty, and make what has been called the

"King-hypothesis" seem more probable than the "Shepherd-hypothesis," implies an estrangement between bride and bridegroom almost on the morning after their marriage, and in ch. iv. 6 it would appear that the bride proposes on her very wedding-day to withdraw from the company of her husband.

Other arguments on either side imply a closer examination into details than it is possible here to give. It must be remembered that difficulties arise upon every interpretation, and that we can hardly expect, with the bare text of the poem before us,—a text which in certain crucial places is very obscure,—to propound an explanation which will meet every difficulty and answer every question. On the third hypothesis, it seems strange to suppose on the one hand that a shepherd-rival could be permitted to hold any kind of an interview with a maiden detained in the king's palace;[1] and on the other hand, quite foreign to our ideas that the apostrophes of the Shulamite should be throughout addressed to an absent lover, and her conversations with him be purely ideal or visionary. But it is replied, that under the very simple dramatic conditions of the

[1] Dr. Friedländer has lately propounded the theory that the scene of the whole poem lies in the country, that it contains nothing to remind us of Jerusalem or a king's palace. See *Jewish Quarterly Review*, July 1894, p. 648.

poem, this was the only way in which the Shulamite's fidelity to the absent one could be set forth. On any hypothesis, the paragraph, ch. vi. 13–vii. 9, presents great difficulty. The previous verses are obscure, and of the explanations given of "the chariots of Ammi-nadib" no one seems quite satisfactory. The passage, ch. vi. 11, 12, appears, however, to describe the circumstances under which the Shulamite allowed herself to be surprised and taken away among the retinue of King Solomon—

I went down into the nut-garden,
To look among the green plants of the valley,
To see whether the vine was budding,
Whether the pomegranates were in bloom.
—Unwittingly my soul had set me
Among the chariots of my prince's companions.

How, then, are we to understand the following words? The Shulamite, even while describing her unwilling detention, begins to move away. The ladies of Jerusalem, now in different mood from that described in the opening of the poem, address the Shulamite in admiration, and beg her to return to her place in the court, where her beauty will be duly appreciated—

Return, return, O Shulamite!
Return, return, that we may look upon thee.
What will you behold in the Shulamite,
Like a dance of Mahanaim [double choirs]?

Whether the last two lines should be put into

the mouth of the maiden, or the last line ascribed to the king or the ladies of the court; who utters the description of the maiden's beauty that follows, and in what sense; where the description ends, and how the closing words in ch. vii. 8, 9, are to be understood,—these are questions which puzzle all interpreters, and have driven some to suppose that an interpolation has taken place here, a passage having crept into the text which upon any theory is very difficult to fit in with the rest.[1]

Another difficulty at a critical point is found in the enigmatical language of ch. viii. 11, 12, which is thus rendered in R.V.:—

> Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon;
> He let out the vineyard unto keepers;
> Every one for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.
> My vineyard, which is mine, is before me:
> Thou, O Solomon, shalt have the thousand,
> And those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.

On the second hypothesis, this reference to one of Solomon's vineyards is supposed to prepare the way for a request that Solomon, who had obtained in the person of the Shulamite so precious a "vineyard," would generously remember her brothers, who are spoken of as "keepers of the fruit," and make suitable provision for them!

[1] So apparently Prof. Robertson Smith, in his brief but very full article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th edition.

On the third hypothesis, the Shulamite is dwelling upon the value of an estate which Solomon had offered to consign to her if she became his; she enthusiastically declares that she prefers to keep her own modest position, and that Solomon may use as he will, and let out to whom he will, the vineyards and possessions which are as nothing to her in comparison with her love. Both of these explanations may seem arbitrary; but the passage in any case is difficult, and the latter explanation certainly seems the easier and better fits in with the context, see ch. viii. 6, 7. These are specimens of obscurities which remain on any view of the poem, and which we may allow to remain without being obliged to give up the whole problem as insoluble.

In seeking to form a judgment as to the general meaning of the Song, and the way in which it is to be read as a part of the Bible to-day, it may be well to take a very rapid survey of the history of opinion upon the subject. Evidence seems to show that the book was not in the first instance understood allegorically by the Jews, but by the time of Christ, or not long afterwards, this view began to prevail over all others. Many passages might be quoted from the sayings of Rabbis between 200 and 500 A.D., showing that the interpretation adopted in the Targum (about 550 A.D.)

had become general, according to which the Song of Songs is an allegory, the Shulamite representing the congregation of Israel, the bridegroom being Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, and the whole book regarded as a prophetic history of the Jewish people from the Exodus to the coming of Messiah. The same idea obtained in the Middle Ages, when the Song came to be used in connexion with the services of the Passover, the feast which celebrated the Exodus from Egypt as the beginning of the true conjugal relation between God and His people. In the eighteenth century discussion arose among Jewish scholars concerning the validity of the highly elaborated allegorical interpretations which had obtained in the Jewish Church, and the view that the Song represents the victory of true and virtuous love in humble life over the temptations of royalty and affluence may be said now to have established itself amongst the best Jewish exegetes. A similar history may be traced amongst Christian expositors, who in the early centuries were certainly influenced in their interpretation of the Old Testament by Jewish and Alexandrian modes of exegesis, whilst Christian scholars in later days have doubtless exercised considerable influence upon the thought of Judaism. Origen, about the middle of the third century, admits the historical sense of the book

as forming a kind of epithalamium on the marriage of Solomon with Pharaoh's daughter, but the real meaning in his view is developed in an elaborate allegory, in which the bridegroom is Christ, the bride the Church, the companions of the former being angels and saints in heaven, and the maidens of the latter believers on the earth. Athanasius, about a century later, says: "The whole book is an allegory, and is to be understood enigmatically from beginning to end. Its doctrines are secrets, and those only who are well versed in allegory ought to study it, as it is sure to be corrupted in the hands of others. It is an epithalamium in celebration of the marriage of Him who is the loved of God and human flesh. The book is full of dialogues between the Son of God and the human race; sometimes between men in general and Christ, sometimes between Him and His ancient people; sometimes between Him and the Gentile Church, sometimes between the Gentiles and Jerusalem, and sometimes between ministering angels and men." Augustine does but represent the prevalent opinion of the Church for centuries when he interprets ch. ii. 15, "Take us the foxes," etc., by saying, "That is, withstand, confute, subdue heretics that injure the ecclesiastical vines. Bind them by Scripture testimony, as Samson bound the foxes together and put fire

to their tails, by warning them of the condemnation they have deserved." Again, on ch. i. 7, "Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon?" he writes, "The Church asks Christ to tell her where the one true Church is, where it feeds and reclines. The bridegroom answers, In the meridian, I feed in the meridian, I recline in the meridian. The Church exists in other parts, but in Africa is its meridian." The only exception to the prevailing tendency is the commentary of the sober and accurate Theodore of Mopsuestia, who adhered to the literal and obvious sense of the words, and was condemned by his contemporaries accordingly. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, as is well known, delivered a long course of sermons on the Canticles — eighty-six sermons on the first two chapters—in which the mystical meaning is elaborated to the fullest extent. Some parts of these sermons appear now to be little less than childish, but the spirit and methods of the mystic theologians of the Middle Ages must be taken into account if their value is to be fairly estimated.

Luther in this, as in so much else, broke through the prejudices of generations. He rejected the allegorical interpretation of the Fathers, and substituted one of his own, which can hardly be said

to have survived him, that the bride of this poem is the happy and peaceful state under the dominion of Solomon, the Song itself being a hymn of praise, in which Solomon thanks God for the obedience rendered to him as a Divine gift. In succeeding centuries, amongst Roman Catholics, the book was largely used to justify Mariolatry, while Cocceius characteristically regarded it as a kind of Old Testament Apocalypse, containing a prophetical narrative of all the events to happen in the Christian Church to the end of time. Puritan writers for the most part enlarge upon the spiritual truths which the book appeared to them to contain, with the laborious minuteness which was characteristic of all their exegesis. Wesley held that the descriptions of the book could not with decency be used concerning Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter, and that they must therefore be understood "concerning that spiritual love and marriage which is between Christ and His Church."

Towards the end of the last century, however, a better understanding of the meaning and use of the Old Testament Scriptures began to prevail. On the one hand, there was a tendency to rationalism; but amongst orthodox teachers a close and critical study of the text, combined with simplicity and fidelity of exegesis, brought about a more sober and healthy mode of treatment of Scripture,

both in Germany and England. The details of this history we need not pursue; enough to say that the allegorical interpretation of the Song is now abandoned by almost all scholars, though fifty years ago Keil and Hengstenberg, and thirty years ago Bishop Wordsworth, may be named as representatives of nineteenth-century allegorisers. At the present time, the view of Delitzsch, which represents the Song as a poem in honour of marriage, in which Solomon is the bridegroom and the Shulamite the bride, typically and ideally setting forth the relation between Christ and the Church, is represented by such writers as Zöckler in Lange's *Bibel-werk*, Mr. Kingsbury in the *Speaker's Commentary*, and Mr. Deane in the new edition of Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*. Godet may also be named in this connexion, though his view is difficult to classify. The view which represents the poem as a celebration of true and virtuous affection, untainted by the splendour and luxuries of a court, and found faithful to its early vows and allegiance, has commended itself to scholars such as Ewald and Ginsburg, Driver and Robertson Smith, and, as we have said, may be regarded as at present the theory prevailing amongst scholars and critics. We proceed to give our own view of the poem and the way in which it may be profitably regarded as

a part of Holy Scripture by the Christian of to-day.

The Song of Songs is a sacred poem of North Palestine, not written by Solomon, but dating from a period not long after his time, probably about the middle of the tenth century B.C. It is pastoral in character, a lyrical drama of the simplest and most primitive kind. Its action is carried on partly by monologue, partly by dialogue, but, the persons not being specified, nor always explicitly recognised, it is impossible to mark out definitely the details of its progress. The attempt to judge it by the rules of later drama must be ineffectual; its light and graceful structure does not describe, but only suggests action, and to modern and Western minds this absence of definiteness produces obscurity. The poetry is exquisite, and the pictures it presents most attractive, even when it is difficult to fit them into a connected whole. The vineyards upon the hillsides with their sun-browned keepers, the shepherds with their flocks, resting in shady places under stress of the noontide heat, the fawns feeding among the lilies, the apples and citrons with their rich fragrance, the clusters of henna-flowers, the gardens like beds of aromatic spices, the fountains which refresh them, the gentle winds which blow upon them, the hills and valleys of the land that

floweth with milk and honey, from Sharon to Gilead, from Lebanon to Engedi, are all touched by a living hand in a series of lovely pictures. An air of springtime is diffused over the whole—

> My beloved spake, and said to me,
> Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away!
> For, lo, the winter is past,
> The rain is over, is gone;
> The flowers appear in the fields;
> The time of singing is come,
> The cooing of the turtle-dove is heard in our land;
> The fig tree sweetens her green figs,
> And the vines blossom,
> They give forth their fragrance.
> Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away!

It is a love-poem. The tenderness of affection breathes through every line, through all the abundant figures of speech which make the verses glisten as with jewels of price. The mode of speech is Eastern—richer, warmer, more ornate than colder climes permit. The poem should not be read by any who come to it with preconceived ideas of taste and fitness, drawn from other habits of thought and life. They will find its lusciousness pall and cloy, they may easily misunderstand its wealth of detail. It is pure as the driven snow, and should be read only by those whose hearts and hands are pure enough to fit them to handle it.

How fair is thy love, my sister, my betrothed!
How sweet is thy love above wine!
And the fragrance of thy perfumes above all spices!
Thy lips, O my betrothed, drop honey:
Honey and milk are under thy tongue;
And the odour of thy garments is as the odour of Lebanon.
A garden enclosed is my sister, my betrothed;
A garden shut up, a fountain sealed.
Awake, O North wind; and come, thou South,
Blow upon my garden,
That its perfumes may flow out!

It is a love-poem. The history of the pure affection of man and maid, its tender upspringing in youthful days among the firs and cedars of the North country, its sorrows and longings in the time of separation, its tenacity and fidelity under pressure of strong temptation, its wistfulness in absence, its power and triumph at the last, can only be traced with difficulty amidst the many rapid turns and frequent obscurities of the poem. The colours are rich and deep, but the outlines of the picture are faintly drawn. The history is clear enough, however, to enable us to trace in it the Trials and Triumph of Love. The refrain which meets the ear at intervals[1] is a key to the whole.

[1] See ch. ii. 7, iii. 5, viii. 4. Compare the significant variation in ch. v. 8.

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles and by the hinds of the field,
That ye stir not up nor awaken love,
Till it please.

True love springs up in the heart unbidden. The pure flame of ardent attachment which kindles in the language of the Song does not belong to the court, but to the "wilderness." No inmates of an Eastern harem, with its luxury and self-indulgence can artificially arouse a passion so tender and strong as that which makes the notes of this music still tremulous after the lapse of centuries. It is beyond question that, whatever the now untraceable allusions and details hinted at rather than described in this charming poem, its pith and core, its main lesson and memorable message intended for all time, are to be found in the impassioned words—

Oh set me as a seal upon thy heart,
As a seal upon thine arm!
For love is strong as death;
Ardent love is inexorable as the grave:
The flashes thereof are flashes of fire,
A very flame of JEHOVAH!
Many waters cannot quench love,
Neither can the floods drown it:
If a man would give all the substance of his house for love,
He would be utterly despised.

This is the strain which gives character to the book. This gives the strength to its feeling, the beauty to its language, the warmth to its imagery. This is the salt which preserves from decay forms of speech which in so many respects are alien to our tongues, and which preserves from the taint of sensuous corruption language which may easily be misinterpreted. Love, true and pure, of man for maid, of maiden for her beloved, is a very flame of Jehovah! Here is a link between earth and heaven; in these words a ray from beyond the skies pours light and warmth into a cold and selfish world—

> Its holy flame for ever burneth;
> From Heaven it came, to Heaven returneth.

He who setteth the solitary in families, who said, "It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for him," He who knows the needs and longings, the capacities and aspirations of the human hearts Himself has fashioned, has crowned all His earthly gifts to man with the supreme gift of love. This recognition of the meaning and value of pure human affection is to be found in many parts of the Bible, but nowhere so fully and richly as in the Song of Songs. It is surely no small matter that this sphere of man's life should be hallowed by the express seal of

religion. Human nature tends on the one hand to sensuous indulgence, so that pure affection loses the fineness and delicacy of its bloom; then it runs to the other extreme, denounces the flesh as in itself evil, and marriage as a mere concession to human frailty. The religion of the Bible claims the whole of life for God. The Song of Songs increases the range and strengthens the hold of Old Testament teaching in this its testimony for God on the earth. If it is a gain that in Job we have man's questionings and searchings into the problems of life recognised and turned to highest account; if it is a gain that in Proverbs the ordering of daily conduct in business and in society, the prudence and provision for things honourable in the sight of men, is brought into relation to the loftiest motives and springs of action; if the Old Testament is the richer because in Ecclesiastes it does not disdain to recognise even the dark moods of pessimism and describe them at length in order to show their true remedy; then surely we may rejoice that in the Song of Songs the sphere of sexual love, and what is sometimes called romance, is purified by the recognition of its beauty and value in the complex nature which God has made, and which He designs should be consecrated to the highest ends. Tennyson only renders into modern

language a lesson which poets and sages of all generations have repeated—

> For indeed I know
> Of no more subtle master under Heaven
> Than is the maiden passion for a maid,
> Not only to keep down the base in man,
> But teach high thought and amiable words,
> And courtliness and the desire of fame,
> And love of truth, and all that makes a man.

But the Bible teaches us more than this. It is its function to build a ladder between earth and heaven, and it leaves out no single round which may help to raise man upwards. Man's passions may debase and degrade him; if he will learn the lesson of the Song of Songs, they shall not only be purified and help to purify and sweeten his whole life, but pure earthly love shall lead Godwards and heavenwards.

For we at least do not believe that the full significance of the Song has yet been declared. If it had been discovered alone, as a fragment of Oriental literature, it would hardly be legitimate to draw more meaning from it than we have thus far found in it. Even so, its ethical standard is indefinitely higher than that of most Eastern nations, and higher than the standards practically recognised amongst the Jews in the time of Solomon. But this poem has not been discovered

by itself in some Persian or Babylonian city; it is part of a sacred literature with a recognised history and scope. Whilst this does not warrant us in reading into the poem ideas altogether foreign to it, it does enable us to say what were the associations in the minds of the Jews for many generations connected with this subject of human affection and marriage. It does enable us to say that this nation was accustomed to link together the ideas of the love of God and the love of man, was accustomed to speak of Israel as affianced to God, a true bride of Jehovah, whose duty it was to be faithful to that allegiance, and not to form impure and adulterous attachments to idols and forms of idol-worship. The language thus used was no doubt figurative, but these modes of speech had become so inwoven into the language as to form part of its very fibre and tissue. Passages, too, may be found in which it is almost difficult to tell whether the bond of love and marriage between man and woman is spoken of, or the bond of devotion and service which bound Israel to her Lord and God. A few only may be mentioned. So early as in the Book of the Covenant, Ex. xxxiv. 15, Israel is warned not "to go a-whoring after other gods," a note which is re-echoed in Deut. xxxi. 16, and in many other places. In Isa. liv. 5, God deigns to say to

His people, "Thy Maker is thine husband, the Lord of hosts is His name"; in ch. lxii. 4, 5, it is said of the land that it shall be called "Beulah," *i.e.* Married; for "as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." Very tender is the language of Hosea, as at some length he dwells upon the relation between God and His people, under this figure: "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. . . . And it shall be at that day, saith Jehovah, thou shalt call me Ishi, my husband, and shalt call me no more Baali, my lord. . . . And I will betroth thee unto me for ever." The Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel abound in language which implies the same underlying thought. Finally, in the 45th Psalm we have the nearest approach to the language of the Song of Songs that is to be found in the Old Testament, and as to it some are still doubtful whether it be the epithalamium of a royal marriage, or describes the relation between the Church and her Redeemer, or whether the poet, having begun with the one subject, passed insensibly into the other. It is hardly needful to add that in the New Testament the figure of the Church as the Bride of her Saviour is fully sustained, or to quote once more the language of St. Paul, "The twain shall become one flesh. This

mystery is great, but I speak in regard of Christ and of the Church."

These quotations do not warrant us in saying that the subject of the Song is the relation between Jehovah and Israel. They are mostly subsequent in date, and all of them are explicitly metaphorical, the context sufficiently indicating the meaning. But they do warrant us in saying that there was a close connexion in the mind of the Jews between what may be called earthly and heavenly affection, earthly and heavenly marriage-bonds. It would in our judgment be going too far to say that the writer of the Song of Songs ever contemplated the shepherd-lover of the poem as a type, but it is quite admissible to say that in his mind and the minds of his readers there was a close connexion between the earthly love which rejected the attractions of a court with its "threescore queens and fourscore concubines and virgins without number,"—wives who, as we are expressly told in 1 Kings, "turned away Solomon's heart after other gods,"—and that devotion to Jehovah which was ever to be maintained by His faithful servants. If the connexion is not close in the minds of modern critics who treat the Song as an independent piece of literature, it is because they have not sufficiently realised the conditions and entered

into the spirit of a literature which must be read as a whole if it is to be read aright.

This connexion of thought once established, the legitimacy of employing the language of a poem which celebrates the one kind of affection, in order to set forth the delights and excellences of another, is manifest. This is not to say that the writer had in his mind, when writing, the thoughts which moved in Hosea when he penned his 2nd chapter, or the feelings which prompted Bernard to write his sermons on the Canticles. But the fact that the Jews were for centuries familiar with this tender and gracious analogy as unfolded by the prophets, and the fact that Christians have for a still longer period made use of similar language to express the inexpressibly lofty relation between Christ and the Church which He loved and for which He gave Himself, makes such an *application* of the words of the Song appropriate and impressive. Interpretation is one thing, application another. But how pure and lofty is that strain which, when written of constant and devoted human love, is capable of being used to express the greatness and excellence of love Divine. The words of the Song, if thus applied, must be very cautiously used. We draw near to sacred ground. Pearls, when cast before swine, will only be trampled under feet in the

mire. The language of some Christian teachers when giving what is called a spiritual exposition of this book has not been restrained by that holy shame which the deepest reverence teaches. But, rightly used, the language of this book may become a help to devotion. Who could or would eliminate from Christian literature the allusions to ch. i. 7, which have inspired so many meditations and lent beauty to so many hymns?—

> The pasture I languish to find,
> Where all who their Shepherd obey
> Are fed, on Thy bosom reclined,
> And screened from the heat of the day.

The use of the term "Rose of Sharon," which has become familiar to Christians, is founded on a mistake. It is not the Beloved, but the Shulamite, who speaks in ch. ii. 1, and she describes herself as a modest meadow-flower, not as the queen of a garden. But another figure has enshrined itself in sacred art and in sacred song, one which was first suggested by ch. v. 2, and then taken up in the well-known passage of the Apocalypse—

> I was asleep, but my heart waked:
> Hark! my beloved! He knocketh, saying,
> Open to me, my sister, my love,
> My dove, my undefiled:
> For my head is filled with dew,
> My locks with the drops of the night.

Significant, again, and true to the original imagery, is the description of the Church in the words—

> Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,
> Fair as the moon,
> Bright as the sun,
> Terrible as bannered hosts?

The aspect of the Shulamite in her maiden purity and devotion is fair in the eyes of the world, but it is terrible also. Clothed with the might which consecrated love imparts, she goes forth on her way to conquer by her beauty, to conquer also by the awe she inspires. The world still asks, as did the daughters of Jerusalem, "What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost" refuse the ease and pomp and blandishments which await thee, and hold on thy way clad in the resplendent armour of stainless loyalty and invincible devotion? And the Bride makes answer as of old, "My beloved is . . . the chiefest among ten thousand. . . . His speech is most sweet; yea, He is altogether lovely. . . . My beloved is mine, and I am His; He feedeth His flock among the lilies." "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or sword?" Shall luxury, or ease, or wealth, or dignity, or honour, or power?

Nay, we are persuaded that "neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Our survey is ended, however slightly and inadequately made. The "Wisdom-Literature" of the Old Testament is but a section of a much greater whole, a section usually considered subordinate in character and importance. Yet it becomes full of instruction when we give to it the meed of thoughtful attention it deserves. Whilst travelling for the most part on the high-roads, it is well to tread sometimes the bypaths of Scripture. Flowers are there, and shady banks; trees whose fruit is good for food, and their leaves for medicine; glimpses into pleasant places of thought, sights of far Delectable Mountains; and every path, wisely trodden, leads into that Way of holiness, in which even the ignorant wayfarer shall not go astray, guided at last to Him who for every pilgrim-child of man, is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.

INDEX OF TEXTS.

PAGE

GENESIS.

i. 7 . . 152
ii. 24 . . 283
xxv. 14 . . 117
xli. 2 . . 65

EXODUS.

xxxi. 3 . . 10
xxxiv. 15 . . 305

DEUTERONOMY.

iv. 19 . . 38
xxxi. 16 . . 305

1 KINGS.

iii. . . . 10
iv. 29-34 . 3
32, 33 . 108
33 . . 10
x. 1 . . 108
xi. 3 . . 307
xxii. 21-23 . 46

1 CHRONICLES.

xvi. 7-36 . . 216
xxi. 1 . . 46

2 CHRONICLES.

xxxii. 23 . . 117

PAGE

JOB.

i. 20, 22 . 83
ii. 10 . . 82
iii. 3-10 . 42
14 . . 36
iv. 10, 11, . 63
vi. 4, 10 . 83
15-20 . 64
vii. 12-16 . 60
17 . . 42
19, 20 . 61
viii. 11, 12 . 64
16-19 . 65
ix. 7-9 . . 70
24 . . 39
25, 26 . 67
27 . . 61
28 . . 43
30, 31 . 61
xii. 2 . . 62
16-25 . 39
xiii. 25 . . 67
28 . . 43
xiv. 11 . . 42
xv. 7 . . 42
26 . . 68
xvi. 12-14 . 62
xviii. 5, 6, . 42
15 . . 36
xix. 21 . 62
25-27 . 90
xxi. 12 . 36
xxii. 6, 27 . 38

PAGE

xxii. 16 . 36
24 . 46
xxiv. 2, 9 . 38
12 . 39
xxvi. 5, 6, 11, 14 . 72
12 . 43
xxviii. 3-7 . 68
12, 14, 22, 28 69
16 . 46
xxix. 3, 4, 6, 19, 20 73
7 . 38
xxx. 31 . 36
xxxi. 11, 26 38
19-23 . 63
xxxvii. 7. . 66
xxxviii. 1 . . 36
4-7, 31, 32 . 71
xl. 1 . . 36
2-5 . 96
xlii. 5, 6, . 96, 263
11 . 36

PSALMS.

i. . . 13
viii. 4 . . 42
xxxvii. . 13, 263
xlv. . . 306
xlix. . . 263
xlix. 4 . . 124

PAGE

PSALMS.

l. . . 13
lxxiii. . 13, 264
lxxvii. . . 249
lxxviii. 2 . 124
lxxxvii. . . 118
lxxxviii. . . 263
xcvi. . . 216
cv. . . 216
cvi. . . 216
cxii. . . 13

PROVERBS.

i. 1 . . 217
6 . . 124
7 . . 132
22 . . 161
32 . . 182
iii. 11 . . 137
19, 20 . 143
32, 33 . 138
iv. 8, 9. . 208
23 . . 165
v. 22 . . 209
vi. 1 . . 193
8 . . 119
16–19 124, 168
vii. 7 . . 161
26 . . 192
viii. . . 5
1 . . 144
5 . . 161
14 . . 146
15 . . 10
22, 23 . 148
25 . . 42
27–31 . 6
30 . 149, 150
32 . . 151
34–36 . 19
ix. . . 5
10 . . 133
12 . . 120
18 . . 162
x. 1, 2, 6, 11 110
12 . . 173
14 . . 177
18 . . 175

PAGE

x. 27 . . 139
xi. 1 . . 139
4 . . 110
13 . . 185
15 . . 193
xii. 4 . . 200
16 . . 172
18 . . 177
xiii. 9 . . 42
14 . . 110
24 . . 167
xiv. 10 . . 164
12 . . 109
15, 18 . 161
17, 29 . 171
27 . 110, 133
29 . . 172
30 . . 175
31 . . 111
34 . . 204
xv. 11 . . 140
15 . . 188
20 . . 110
26 . . 179
33 . . 174
xvi. 3, 7, 9 . 136
18 . . 174
24 . . 179
25 . . 109
28 . . 178
32 . . 172
xvii. 3 . . 163
5 . 111, 139
9 . . 178
17 . . 15
18 . . 193
22 . . 188
xviii. 6, 7 . 178
9 . . 181
11, 16 . 195
12 . . 174
21 . . 177
22 . . 139
xix. 4 . 195, 196
5, 9 . 176
14 . . 140
17 . 139, 197
xx. 6 . . 186

PAGE

xx. 8, 26 . 203
10 . 139
17 . 176
27 . 141
xxi. 2 . 140
9, 19 . 201
23 . 179
30, 31 . 141
xxii. 3. . 161
7. . 196
13 . 180
16 107, 195
17 5, 107
26, 27 . 193
29 . 181
xxiii. 10, 11 . 197
15, 19 . 166
17 . 137
18 . 207
xxiv. 11 . 187
20, 21 . 203, 207
22, 34 . 120
23 . 107
xxv. 1 . 107
6, 7 . 113
13 . 186
18 . 176
21, 22 . 187
25, 15, 126
xxvi. 7 . 122
14, 15 . 180
16 . 181
21 . 172
28 . 176
xxvii. 4 . 175
12 . 161
16 . 201
19 . 128
21 . 127
xxviii. 5 . 137
8 . 195
13 . 165
xxx. 1 . 116
15, 16, 18, 19 124
xxxi. 1-9, 10-31 . 107
30 . 202

PAGE

ECCLESIASTES.

i. 1 . 220, 228, 239, 253
3 . . 212
7 . . 239
12 . 215, 217
13 . . 11
16 . 217, 218
ii. 7-9, 18, 19 218
iii. 9 . . 241
11 . 225, 241 253, 266
14 . . 247
16-22 240, 244
21 . 251, 257
iv. 9 . . 245
v. 2, 7 . 247, 254
8, 9 . 222, 245
18-20 253, 254
vii. 20, 26-28. 245
25 . . 11
29 . . 248
viii. 2-9 . . 218
12, 13 247, 254
17 . . 253
ix. 1 . . 248
7 . . 254
10 . . 253
18 . . 246
x. 16-18 218, 223
20 . . 223
xi. 5 . . 253
9 252, 254, 255
xii. 1 . . 255
7 226, 251, 256
8 227, 253, 255, 256, 261
9-14 226, 250, 252, 256
11 . . 5
13, 14 212, 254

SONG OF SONGS.

i. 1 . . 217
7 . 295, 309
ii. 7 278, 300, 301
ii. 10-13 . 299
15 . . 294
iii. 5 . . 300
iv. 6 . . 289
11 . . 300
v. 2 . . 309
8 . . 300
10, 16 . 310
vi. 3 . . 310
8 . . 288
10 . . 310
11, 12 . 290
13 283, 289, 290
vii. 8, 9 . 291, 298
11 . . 280
viii. 4 . . 300
5, 8, 11, 14 272
6, 7 292, 301
11, 12 274, 291

ISAIAH.

i. 1 . . 274
ii. 1 . . 274
xiii. 1 . . 274
xiv. 4-23 15, 122
xix. 5 . . 42
xxviii. 29 . 11
xxix. 14 . 4
xliv. 24-28 . 43
l. 9 . . 43
li. 9, 10 . 43
liv. 5 . . 305
lxii. 4, 5 . 306

JEREMIAH.

xx. 14-18 . 42
xxi. 8 . . 157

EZEKIEL.

xiv. 14 . . 27

DANIEL.

i. 4 . . 5
xii. 2 . . 257

ECCLESIASTICUS.

xxiv. 7-11 . 130

PAGE

MATTHEW.

vii. 7 . . 151
xi. 19 . . 8

LUKE.

vii. 35 . . 8
ix. 25 . . 266
xiv. 7-11 . 113

JOHN.

ix. 4 . . 183
xx. 25 . . 263

ROMANS.

viii. 38 . . 311

1 CORINTHIANS.

ii. 6 . . 8
xii. 28 . . 5
xiii. 4 . . 173
9 . . 254

EPHESIANS.

iv. 11 . . 5

COLOSSIANS.

ii. 8 . . 2

1 TIMOTHY.

vi. 20 . . 2

HEBREWS.

ix. 9 . . 265

JAMES.

i. 5 . . 151
v. 11 . . 27

1 PETER.

iv. 8 . . 173

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

THE PRAISES OF ISRAEL: An Introduction to the Psalms. With Appendix treating briefly of the Age, Authorship, and Contents of each Psalm. Fifth Thousand. 2s. 6d.

"As nearly perfect as a manual can be. It is the work of a reverent and open-minded scholar, who has spared no pains to compress into this small volume the best information and the most trustworthy results arrived at by himself and other experts. Nothing could be finer than the spirit in which the book is written, and to read it is an education in criticism."—Dr. MARCUS DODDS.

THE CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF LIFE, and other Essays. Post 8vo, 4s. 6d.

"An exceedingly able and instructive criticism from the orthodox standpoint. He brings to his topics not only a thorough grasp of the points in discussion, but a general literary culture and an epigrammatic force of expression which make it a real pleasure to read him."—*Christian World.*

THE CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE: A Contribution to Christian Ethics. Fernley Lecture of 1888. Fifth Thousand. Demy 8vo, paper covers, 2s.; cloth, 3s.

"Acute, forcible, and interesting. . . . Treats a large subject without superficiality, and yet in a popular style."—*Scotsman.*

THE LORD'S SUPPER: Aids to its Intelligent and Devout Observance. Second Thousand. Small crown 8vo, red lines round page, cloth, red edges, 2s.

"The book teems with instruction, admonition, and encouragement. It is throughout characterised by clear and scholarly exposition, intense yet subdued feeling, felicitous expression, and keen mental and spiritual insight. The pages are packed with the ripe fruits of a fine intellect and spirit."—*Methodist Recorder.*

THE WORD IN THE HEART: Notes on the Devotional Study of Holy Scripture. Fifth Thousand. Demy 16mo, cloth, 1s.

"We cannot but anticipate great and extensive usefulness from this little volume, so cheap, so small, but so suggestive and impressive."—*London Quarterly Review.*

LONDON: CHARLES H. KELLY, 25-35 CITY ROAD,
AND 26 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

BS1455.D3
CLAPP
3 5002 00114 9447
Davison, William Theophilus
The wisdom-literature of the Old Testame

BS
1455
D3

AUTHOR
Davison

74270

TITLE
Wisdom-literature of the O.D.

DATE DUE	BORROWER'S NAME
[illegible]	070500
05 23 9	
DEC 5 1981	
12 22 1	
12 2[illegible]	

BS
1455
D3

14270